GOD AND MR. WELLS

WILLIAM ARCHER

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GOD AND MR. WELLS

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF "GOD THE INVISIBLE KING"

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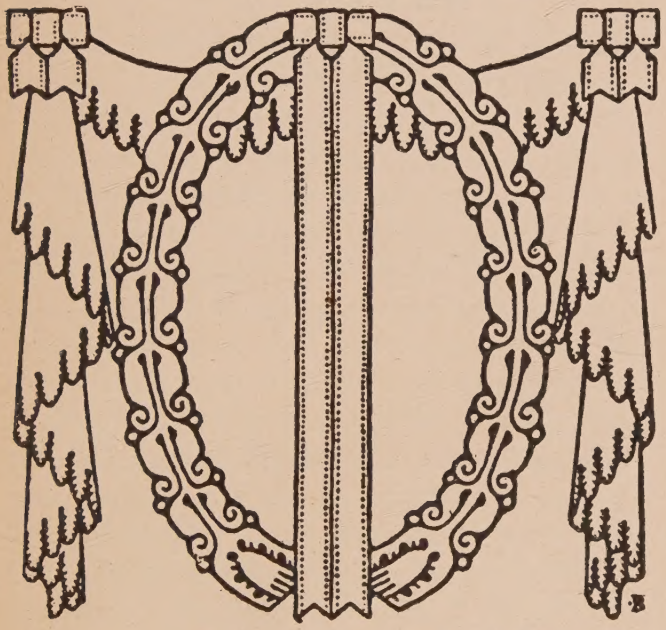

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FOREWORD

As I look through the proofs of this little treatise, a twinge of compunction comes upon me. That humane philosopher Mr. Dooley has somewhere a saying to this effect: "When an astronomer tells me that he has discovered a new planet, I would be the last man to brush the fly off the end of his telescope." Would not this have been a good occasion for a similar exercise of urbanity? Nay, may it not be said that my criticism of *God the Invisible King* is a breach of discipline, like duelling in the face of the enemy? I am proud to think that Mr. Wells and I are soldiers in the same army; ought we not at all costs to maintain a united front? On the destructive side (which I have barely touched upon) his book is brilliantly effective; on the constructive side, if unconvincing, it is thoughtful, imaginative, stimulating, a thing on the whole to be grateful for. Ought one not rather to hold one's peace than to afford the common enemy the encouragement of witnessing a squabble in the ranks?

But we must not yield to the obsession of military metaphor. It is not what the enemy thinks or what Mr. Wells or I think that matters—it is what the men of the future ought to think, as being consonant with their own nature and with the nature of things. Ideas, like organisms, must abide the struggle for existence, and if the Invisible King is fitted to survive, my criticism will reinforce and not invalidate him. Even if he should come to life in a way one can scarcely anticipate, his proceedings will have to be carefully watched. He cannot claim the reticences of a "party truce." He will be all the better for a candid, though I hope not captious, Opposition.

I thought of printing on my title-page a motto from Mr. Bernard Shaw; but it will perhaps come better here. "The fact," says Mr. Shaw, "that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality of happiness, and by no means a necessity of life. Whether Socrates got as much happiness out of life as Wesley is an unanswerable question; but a nation of Socrateses would be much safer and happier than a nation of Wesleys; and its indi-

viduals would be higher in the evolutionary scale. At all events, it is in the Socratic man and not in the Wesleyan that our hope lies now."

Besides, it has yet to be proved that the believer in the Invisible King is happier than the sceptic.

LONDON, *May* 24, 1917.

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GOD AND MR. WELLS

I

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

WHEN it was known that Mr. H. G. Wells had set forth to discover God, all amateurs of intellectual adventure were filled with pleasurable excitement and anticipation. For is not Mr. Wells the great Adventurer of latter-day literature? No quest is too perilous for him, no forlorn-hope too daring. He led the first explorers to the moon. He it was who lured the Martians to earth and exterminated them with microbes. He has ensnared an angel from the skies and expiscated a mermaid from the deep. He has mounted a Time Machine (of his own invention) and gone careering down the vistas of the Future. But these were comparatively commonplace feats. After all, there had been a Jules Verne, there had been a Gulliver and a Peter Wilkins, there had been a More, a Morris and a

Bellamy. It might be that he was fitted for far greater things. "There remains," we said to ourselves, "the blue ribbon of intellectual adventure, the unachieved North Pole of spiritual exploration. He has had countless predecessors in the enterprise, some of whom have loudly claimed success; but their log-books have been full of mere hallucinations and nursery tales. What if it should be reserved for Mr. Wells to bring back the first authentic news from a source more baffling than that of Nile or Amazon—the source of the majestic stream of Being? What if it should be given him to sign his name to the first truly-projected chart of the scheme of things?"

We almost held our breath in eager anticipation, just as we did when there came from America a well-authenticated rumor that the problem of flying had at last been solved. Were we on the brink of another and much more momentous discovery? Was Mr. Wells to be the Peary of the great quest? Or only the last of a thousand Dr. Cooks?

II

A GOD WHO "GROWED"

OUR excitement, our suspense, were so much wasted emotion. Mr. Wells's enterprise was not at all what we had figured it to be.

GOD
THE INVISIBLE KING

is a very interesting, and even stimulating disquisition, full of a fine social enthusiasm, and marked, in many passages, by deep poetic feeling. But it is not a work of investigation into the springs of Being. Mr. Wells explicitly renounces from the outset any dealings with "cosmogony." It is a description of a way of thinking, a system of nomenclature, which Mr. Wells declares to be extremely prevalent in "the modern mind," from which he himself extracts much comfort and fortification, and which he believes to be destined to regenerate the world.

But Mr. Wells will not have it that what is involved is a mere system of nomenclature. He avers that he, in common with many other like-minded persons, has achieved, not so much an intellectual discovery as an emotional realisation, of something actual and objective which he calls God. He does not, so far as I remember, use the term "objective"; but as he insists that God is "a spirit, a person, a strongly marked and knowable personality" (p. 5), "a single spirit and a single person" (p. 18), "a great brother and leader of our little beings" (p. 24) with much more to the same purpose, it would seem that he must have in his mind an object external to us, no mere subjective "stream of tendency," or anything of that sort. It would of course be foolish to doubt the sincerity of the conviction which he so constantly and so eagerly asserts. Nevertheless, one cannot but put forward, even at this stage, the tentative theory that he is playing tricks with his own mind, and attributing reality and personality to something that was in its origin a figure of speech. He has been hypnotized by the word God:

> As when we dwell upon a word we know,
> Repeating, till the word we know so well
> Becomes a wonder, and we know not why.

At all events, "God the Invisible King" is not the creator and sustainer of the universe. As to the origin of things Mr. Wells professes the most profound agnosticism. "At the back of all known things," he says, "there is an impenetrable curtain; the ultimate of existence is a Veiled Being, which seems to know nothing of life or death or good or ill. . . . The new religion does not pretend that the God of its life is that Being, or that he has any relation of control or association with that Being. It does not even assert that God knows all, or much more than we do, about that ultimate Being" (p. 14). Very good; but—here is the first question which seems to arise out of the Wellsian thesis—are we not entitled to ask of "the new religion" some more definite account of the relation between "God" and "the Veiled Being"? Surely it is not enough that it should simply refrain from "asserting" anything at all on the subject. If "God" is outside ourselves ("a Being, not us but dealing with us and through us," p. 6) we cannot leave him hanging in the void, like the rope which the Indian conjurer is fabled to throw up into the air till it hooks itself on to nothingness. If we are to believe in him as a lever for the righting of a world that has somehow run askew, we

want to know something of his fulcrum. Is it possible thus to dissociate him from the Veiled Being, and proclaim him an independent, an agnostic God? Do we really get over any difficulty—do we not rather create new difficulties,—by saying, as Mr. Wells practically does, "Our God is no metaphysician. He does not care, and very likely does not know, how this tangle of existence came into being. He is only concerned to disentangle it a little, to reduce the chaos of the world to some sort of seemliness and order"? Is it an idle and presumptuous curiosity which enquires whether we are to consider him co-ordinate with the Veiled Being, and in that case probably hostile, or subordinate, and in that case instrumental? Are we, in a word, to consider the earth a little rebel state in the gigantic empire of the universe, working out its own salvation under its Invisible King? Or are we to regard God as the Viceroy of the Veiled Being, to whom, in that case, our ultimate allegiance is due?

I talked the other day to a young Australian who had been breaking new land for wheat-growing. "What do you do?" I asked, "with the stumps of the trees you fell? It must be a great labour to clear them out." "We don't clear them

out," he replied. "We use ploughs that automatically rise when they come to a stump, and take the earth again on the other side." I cannot but conjecture that Mr. Wells's thinking apparatus is fitted with some such automatic appliance for soaring gaily over the snags that stud the ploughlands of theology.

III

NEW MYTHS FOR OLD

BEFORE examining the particular attributes and activities of the Invisible King, let us look a little more closely into the question whether a God detached alike from man below and (so to speak) from heaven above, is a thinkable God in whom any satisfaction can be found. Mr. Wells must not reply (he probably would not think of doing so) that "satisfaction" is no test: that he asserts an objective truth which exists, like the Nelson Column or the Atlantic Ocean, whether we find satisfaction in it or not. Though he does not mention the word "pragmatism," his standards are purely pragmatist. He offers no jot or tittle of evidence for the existence of the Invisible King, except that it is a hypothesis which he finds to work extremely well. Satisfaction and nothing else is the test he applies. So we have every right to ask whether the renunciation of all concern about the Veiled Being, and concentration upon the thought of a finite God, practically unrelated to

the infinite, can bring us any reasonable sense of reconciliation to the nature of things. For that, I take it, is the essence of religion.

It was in no spirit of irony that I began this essay by expressing the lively interest with which I learned that Mr. Wells was setting out on the quest for God. The dogmatic agnosticism which declares it impossible ever to know anything about the whence, how and why of the universe does not seem to me more rational than any other dogma which jumps from "not yet" to "never." Mr. Wells himself disclaims that dogma. He says: "It may be that minds will presently appear among us of such a quality that the face of that Unknown will not be altogether hidden" (p. 108). And in another place (p. 15) he suggests that "our God, the Captain of Mankind," may one day enable us to "pierce the black wrappings," or, in other words, to get behind the veil. There is nothing, then, unreasonable or absurd in man's incurable inquisitiveness as to God, in the non-Wellsian sense of the term. God simply means the key to the mystery of existence; and though the keys hitherto offered have all either jammed or turned round and round without unlocking anything, it does not follow that no real key exists within the reach of

human investigation or speculation. Therefore one naturally feels a little stirring of hope at the news that a fresh and keen intellect, untrammelled by the folk-lore theologies of the past, is applying itself to the problem. It is always possible, however improbable, that we may be helped a little forwarder on the path towards realization. One comes back to the before-mentioned analogy of flying. We had been assured over and over again, on the highest authority, that it was an idle dream. When we wanted to express the superlative degree of the impossible, we said "I can no more do it than I can fly." But the irrepressible spirit of man was not to be daunted by *à priori* demonstrations of impossibility. One day there came the rumour that the thing had been achieved, followed soon by ocular demonstration; and now we rub shoulders every day with men who have outsoared the eagle, and—alas!—carried death and destruction into the hitherto stainless empyrean.

It would seem, then, that there is no reason absolutely to despair of some advance towards a conception of the nature and reason of the universe. And it is certain that Mr. Wells's God would stand a better chance of satisfying the innate needs of the human intelligence if he had not

(apparently) given up as a bad job the attempt to relate himself to the causal plexus of the All. Is he outside that causal plexus, self-begotten, self-existent? Then he is the miracle of miracles, a second mystery superimposed on the first. If, on the other hand, he falls within the system, he might surely manage to convey to his disciples some glimmering notion of his place in it. The birth-stories of Gods are always grotesque and unedifying, but that is because they belong to folk-lore. If this God does not belong to folk-lore, surely his relation to the Veiled Being might be indicated without impropriety. Mr. Wells, as we have seen, hints that his reticence may be due to the fact that he does not know. In that case this "modern" God is suspiciously like all the ancient Gods, whose most unfortunate characteristic was that they never knew anything more than their worshippers. The reason was not far to seek—namely, that they were mere projections of the minds of these worshippers, fashioned in their own image. But Mr. Wells assures us that this is not the case of the Invisible King.

Mr. Wells will scarcely deny that if it were possible to compress his mythology and merge his Invisible King in his Veiled Being, the result would

be a great simplification of the problem. But this is not, in fact, possible; for it would mean the positing of an all-good and all-powerful Creator. which is precisely the idea which Mr. Wells rebels against,[1] in common with every one who realizes the facts of life and the meaning of words. Short of this, however, is no other simplification possible? Would it not greatly clarify our thought if we could bring the Invisible King into action, not, indeed, as the creator of all things, but as the organizer and director of the surprising and almost incredible epiphenomenon which we call life? Our scheme would then take this shape: an inconceivable unity behind the veil, somehow manifesting itself, where it comes within our ken, in the dual form of a great Artificer and a mass of terribly recalcitrant matter—the only medium in which he can work. In other words, the Veiled Being

[1] In *Mr. Britling Sees It Through,* which is in some sense a prologue to *God the Invisible King,* we find an emphatic renunciation of the all-good and all-powerful God. "The theologians," says Mr. Britling, "have been extravagant about God. They have had silly, absolute ideas—that he is all powerful. That he's omni-everything. . . . Why! if I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war—able to prevent these things—doing them to amuse himself—I would spit in his empty face" (p. 406).

would be as inscrutable as ever, but the Invisible King, instead of dropping in with a certain air of futility, like a doctor arriving too late at the scene of a railway accident, would be placed at the beginning, not of the universe at large, but of the atomic re-arrangements from which consciousness has sprung. Can we, on this hypothesis (which is practically that of Manichæanism) hazard any guess at the motives or forces actuating the Invisible King,—or, to avoid confusion, let us say the Artificer—which should acquit him of the charge of being a callous and mischievous demon rather than a well-willing God? Can we not only place pain and evil (a tautology) to the account of sluggish, refractory matter, but also conjecture a sufficient reason why the Artificer should have started the painful evolution of consciousness, instead of leaving the atoms to whirl insentiently in the figures imposed on them by the stupendous mathematician behind the veil?

A complete answer to this question would be a complete solution of the riddle of existence. That, if it be ever attainable, is certainly far enough off. But there are some considerations, not always sufficiently present to our minds, which may per-

haps help us, not to a solution, but to a rational restatement, of the riddle.

It is possible to suppose, in the first place, that the Artificer, though entirely well-meaning, was not a free agent. We can construct a myth in which an Elder Power should announce to a Younger Power his intention of setting a number of sentient puppets dancing for his amusement, and regaling himself with the spectacle of their antics, in utter heedlessness of the agonies they must endure, which would, indeed, lend an additional savor to the diversion. This Elder Power, with the "sportsman's" preference for pigeons as against clay balls, would be something like the God of Mr. Thomas Hardy. Then we can imagine the Younger Power, after a vain protest demanding, as it were, the vice-royalty of the new kingdom, in order that he might shape its polity to high and noble ends, educe from tragic imperfection some approach to perfection, and, in short, make the best of a bad business. We should thus have (let us say) Marcus Aurelius claiming a proconsulate under Nero, and, with very limited powers, gradually substituting order and humanity for oppression and rapine. This fairy-tale is not unlike Mr. Wells's; but I submit that it has the advantage of

placing the Invisible King, or his equivalent, in a conceivable relation to the whole mundane process.

Now let us proceed to the alternative hypothesis. Let us suppose that the Artificer was a free agent, and that he voluntarily, and in full view of the consequences, engineered the conjunction of atoms from which consciousness arose. He could have let it alone, he could have suffered life to remain an abortive, slumbering potentiality, like the fire in a piece of flint; yet he deliberately clashed the flint and steel and kindled the torch which was to be handed on, not only from generation to generation, but from species to species, through all the stages of a toilsome, slaughterous, immeasurable ascent. If we accept this hypothesis, can we acquit the Artificer of wanton cruelty? Can we view his action with approval, even with gratitude? Or must we, like Mr. Wells, if we wish to find an outlet for religious emotion, postulate another, subsequent, intermeddling Power—like, say, an American consul at the scene of the Turkish massacre—wholly guiltless of the disaster of life, and doing his little best to mitigate and remedy it?

In the present state of our knowledge, it is certainly very difficult to see how the kindler of the *vitai lampada,* supposing him to have been respon-

sible for his actions, can claim from a jury of human beings a verdict of absolute acquittal. But we can, even now, see certain extenuating circumstances, which evidence not yet available may one day so powerfully reinforce as to enable him to leave the Court without a stain on his character.

For one thing, we are too much impressed and oppressed by the ideas of magnitude and multitude. Since we have realized the unspeakable insignificance of the earth in relation to the unimaginable vastness of star-sown space, we have come to feel such a disproportion between the mechanism of life and its upshot, as known in our own experience, that we have a vague sense of maleficence, or at any rate of brutal carelessness, in the responsible Power, whoever that may be. "What is it all," we say, "but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million of suns?" We feel like insects whom the foot of a heedless giant may at any moment crush. We dream of the swish of a comet's tail wiping out organic life on the planet, and we see, as a matter of fact, great natural convulsions, such as the earthquake of Lisbon or the eruption of Mont Pélée, treating human communities just as an elephant might treat an ant-hill. It is this sense of the immeasurable disproportion in things that a pessi-

mist poet has expressed in the well-known sonnet:—

Know you, my friend, the sudden ecstasy
Of thought that time and space annihilates,
Creation in a moment uncreates,
And whirls the mind, from secular habit free,
Beyond the spheres, beyond infinity,
Beyond the empery of the eternal Fates,
To where the Inconceivable ruminates,
The unthinkable "To be or not to be?"
Then, as Existence flickers into sight,
A marsh-flame in the night of Nothingness—
The great, soft, restful, dreamless, fathomless night—
We know the Affirmative the primal curse,
And loathe, with all its imbecile strain and stress,
This ostentatious, vulgar Universe.

The mood here recorded is one that must be familiar to most thinking people. "The undevout astronomer is mad," said eighteenth-century deism: to-day we are more apt to think that the uncritical astronomer is dense. There is a sort of colossal stupidity about the stars in their courses that overpowers and disquiets us. If (as Alfred Russel Wallace has argued) the geocentric theory was not so far out after all, and the earth, holding a specially favored place in the universe, is the only home of life, then the disproportion of mechanism to result seems absolutely appalling. If, on the other hand, all the million million of suns are

pouring out vital heat to a like number of inhabited planetary systems, the sheer quantity of life, of struggle, of suffering implied, seems a thought at which to shudder. We are inclined to say to the inventor of sentience: "Since this ingenious combination of yours was at best such a questionable boon, surely you might have been content with one experiment."

But all such criticism rests upon a fallacy, or rather a brace of interrelated fallacies. There can be no disproportion between consciousness and the unconscious, because they are absolutely incommensurable; and number, in relation to consciousness, is an illusion. Consciousness, wherever it exists, is single, indivisible, inextensible; and other consciousnesses, and the whole external universe, are, to the individual percipient, but shapes in a more or less protracted dream.

Why should we trouble about vastness—mere extension in space? There is a sense in which the infinitesimally small is more marvellous, more disquieting, than the infinitely great. The ant, the flea, nay, the phagocyte in our blood, is really a more startling phenomenon than all the mechanics and chemistry of the heavens. In worrying about the bigness and the littleness of things, we are

making the human body our standard—the body whose dimensions are no doubt determined by convenience in relation to terrestrial conditions, but have otherwise no sort of sanctity or superiority, rightness or fitness. It happens to be the object to which is attached the highest form of consciousness we know; but consciousness itself has neither parts nor magnitude. And consciousness itself is essentially greater than the very vastness which appals us, seeing that it embraces and envelops it. Enormous depths of space are pictured in my brain, through my optic nerve; and what eludes the magic mirror of my retina, my mind can conceive, apprehend, make its own. It is not even true to say that the mind cannot conceive infinity—the real truth (if I may for once be Chestertonian), the real truth is that it can conceive nothing else. "When Berkeley said there was no matter"—it mattered greatly what he said. Nothing can be more certain than that, apart from percipience, there is no matter that matters. From the point of view of pantheism (the only logical theism) God, far from being a Veiled Being, or an Invisible King, is precisely the mind which translates itself into the visible, sensible universe, and impresses itself, in the form of a never-ending pag-

eant, upon our cognate minds. It has been thought that human consciousness may have come into being because God wanted an audience. He was tired of being a cinematograph-film unreeling before empty benches. Some people have even carried the speculation further, and wondered whether the attachment of percipience to organized matter, as in the case of human beings, may not be a necessary stage in the culture of a pure percipience, capable of furnishing the pageant of the universe with a permanent and appreciative audience. In that case the Scottish Catechism would be justified, which asks "What is the chief end of man?" and answers (as Stevenson says) nobly if obscurely: "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." But enough of these idle fantasies. What is certain is that we can hold up our heads serenely among the immensities, knowing that we are immenser than they. Even if they were malevolent—and that they do not seem to be—they are no more terrible than the familiar dangers of our homely earth. They cannot hurt us more than we can be hurt—an obvious truism but one which is often overlooked. And this brings us to the consideration of the second fallacy which sometimes warps our judgment as to the responsibility of the Power which invented life.

We are all apt to speak and think as though sentience were an article capable of accumulation, like money or merchandise, in enormous aggregates —as though pleasure, and more particularly pain, were subject to the ordinary rules of arithmetic, so that minor quantities, added together, might mount up to an indefinitely gigantic total. Poets and philosophers, time out of mind, have been heart-broken over the enormous mass of evil in the world, and have spoken as though animated nature were one great organism, with a brain in which every pang that afflicted each one of its innumerable members was piled up into a huge, pyramidal agony. But this is obviously not so. That very "individuation" which to some philosophies is the primal curse—the condition by all means to be annulled and shaken off [1]—forbids the adding up of units of sentience. If "individuation" is the source of human misery (which seems a rather meaningless proposition) it is beyond all doubt its boundary and limit. We are each of us his own universe. With each of us the universe is born afresh; with each of us it dies—assuming, that is to say, that consciousness is extinguished at death.

[1] Mr. Wells himself is not far from this view. See *God the Invisible King*, pp. 73, 76, and this book, pp. 39-40.

There never has been and never can be in the world more suffering than a single organism can sustain —which is another way of saying that nothing can hurt us more than we can be hurt. Is this an optimistic statement? Far from it. The individual is capable of great extremities of suffering; and though not all men, or even most, are put to the utmost test in this respect, there are certainly cases not a few in which a man may well curse the day he was born, and see in the universe that was born with him nothing but an instrument of torture. But such an one must speak for himself. It is evident that, take them all round, men accept life as no such evil gift. It cannot even be said that, in handing it on to others, they are driven by a fatal instinct which they know in their hearts to be cruel, and would resist if they could. The vast majority have been, and still are, entirely light-hearted about the matter, thus giving the best possible proof that they cherish no grudge against the source of being, but find it, on the balance, acceptable enough. If it be said that this is due to stupidity, then stupidity is one of the factors in the case which the great Artificer must be supposed to have foreseen and reckoned upon. All these considerations must be taken into account when we try to sum up the re-

sponsibility of an organizer and director of life, acting of his own free will, although he knew that the conditions under which he had to work would make the achievement of any satisfactory result a slow, laborious and painful business.

"But sympathy!" it may be said—"You have left sympathy out of the reckoning. Unless we are not only 'individuals' but iron-clad egotists, we suffer with others more keenly, sometimes, than in our own persons." Sympathy, no doubt, is, like the summer sun and the frost of winter, a fact of common experience causing us alternate joy and pain; but it means no sort of breach in the wall of "individuation." Our nearest and dearest are simply factors in our environment, most influential factors, but as external to us as the trees or the stars. We cannot, in any real sense, draw away their pains and add them to our own, any more than they, in their turn, can relieve us of our toothache or our sciatica. They are the points, doubtless, at which our environment touches us most closely, but neither incantation nor Act of Parliament, neither priest nor registrar, can make even man and wife really "one flesh." It was necessary for the conservation of the species that a strict limit should be set to the operation of

sympathy. Had that emotion been able to pierce the shell of individuality, so that one being could actually add the sufferings of another, or of many others, to his own, life would long ago have come to an end. As it is, sympathy implies an imaginative extension of individuality, which is of enormous social value. But we remain, none the less, isolated each in his own universe, and our fellowmen and women are but shapes in the panorama, the strange, fantastic dream, which the Veiled Showman unrolls before us.

In these post-Darwinian days, moreover, we are inclined to give way to certain morbid and sentimental exaggerations of sympathy, which do some injustice to the great Artificer whom we are for the moment assuming to be responsible for sentient life. Many of us are much concerned about "nature, red in tooth and claw." It is a sort of nightmare to us to think of the tremendous fecundity of swamp and jungle, warren and pond, and of the ruthless struggle for existence which has made earth, air, and sea one mighty battle-ground. In this we are again letting the fallacy of number take hold of us. There can be no aggregate of suffering among lower, any more than among higher, organisms; and the amount of pain which

individual animals have to endure—even animals of those species which we can suppose to possess a certain keenness of sensibility—is probably, in the vast majority of cases, very trifling. Half the anguish of humanity proceeds from the power of looking before and after. The animal, though he may suffer from fear of imminent, visible danger, cannot know the torture of long-drawn apprehension. For most of his life he is probably aware of a vague well-being; then of a longer or shorter—often a very short—spell of vague ill-being; and so, the end. Nor is it possible to doubt that the experience of some animals includes a great deal of positive rapture. If the lark be not really the soul of joy, he is the greatest hypocrite under the sun. Many insects seem to be pin-points of vibrant vitality which we can scarcely believe to be unaccompanied by pleasurable sensation. The mosquito which I squash on the back of my hand, and which dies in a bath of my own blood, has had a short life but doubtless a merry one. The moths which, in a tropic night, lie in calcined heaps around the lamp, have probably perished in pursuit of some ecstatic illusion. It does not seem, on the whole, that we need expend much pity on the brute creation, or make its destinies a reproach to

the great Artificer. Which is not to say, of course, that we ought not to detest and try with all our might to abolish the cruelties of labor, commerce, sport and war.

Again, as to the great calamities—the earthquakes, shipwrecks, railway accidents, even the wars—which are often made a leading count in the arraignment of the Author of Sentience, we must not let ourselves be deceived by the fallacy of number. Their spectacular, dramatic aspect naturally attracts attention; but the death-roll of a great shipwreck is in fact scarcely more terrible than the daily bills of mortality of a great city. It is true that a violent death, overtaking a healthy man, is apt to involve moments, perhaps hours, of acute distress which he might have escaped had he died of gradual decay or of ordinary well-tended disease; and a very short space of the agony sometimes attendant upon (say) a railway accident, probably represents itself to the sufferer as an eternity. But there is also another side to the matter. Instantaneous death in a great catastrophe must be reckoned as mere euthanasia; and even short of this, the attendant excitement has often the effect of an anodyne. In the upshot, no doubt, such occurrences are rightly called disasters, since their ten-

dency is to cause needlessly painful death, under circumstances, which in the main, enhance its terrors; but the sufferings of the victims cannot be added together because they occur within a limited area, any more than if they had been spread over an indefinite tract of space. As for war, it increases the liability of every individual who comes within its wide-flung net to intense bodily and mental suffering, and to premature and painful death. Moreover, it destroys social values which *can* be added up. In this respect it leaves the world face to face with an appalling deficit. But we must not let it weigh upon us too heavily, or make it too great a reproach to the Artificer of human destiny. For the soldier, like every other sentient organism, is immured in his own universe, and his individual debit-and-credit account with the Power which placed him there would be no whit different if he were indeed the only real existence, and the world around him were naught but a dance of shadows.

If there were a country of a hundred million people, in which every citizen was born to an allowance of five pounds, which in all his life he could not possibly increase, or invest in joint-stock enterprises, though he might leave some of it

unexpended—we should not, in spite of the £500,000,000 of its capital, call that a wealthy country. Its effective wealth would be precisely a five-pound note. Similarly, given a world in which every one is born with a limited capacity of sentience, inalienable, incommunicable, unique, we should do wrong to call that world a multi-millionaire in misery, even if it could be proved that in each individual account the balance of sensation was on the wrong side of the ledger. It is true that if, in one man's account, the balance were largely to the bad, he would be entitled to reproach the Veiled Banker, even though five hundred or five thousand of his fellows declared themselves satisfied with the result of their audit. But if the Banker, in opening business, had good reason to think that, in the long run, the contents would largely outvote the non-contents, we could scarcely blame him for going ahead. And what if, for contents and malcontents alike, he had an uncovenanted bonus up his sleeve?

In this disquisition, with its shifting personifications, its Artificer, Author, Banker and the like, we may seem to have wandered far away from Mr. Wells and his Invisible King; but I hope the

reader has not wholly lost the clue. Let us recapitulate. Starting from the idea that its total renunciation of metaphysics, its incuriousness as to causation, was a weakness in Mr. Wells's system, inasmuch as an eager curiosity as to these matters is an inseparable part of our intellectual outfit, we set about enquiring whether it might not be possible to abandon the notions of omnipotence, omniscience and omni-benevolence, and yet to conceive a doctrine of origins into which a well-willing God should enter, not, like the Invisible King, as a sort of remedial afterthought, but as a prime mover in this baffling business of life. We put forward two hypotheses, each of which seemed more thinkable, less in the air, so to speak, than Mr. Wells's scheme of things. We imagined a wholly callous, unpitying Power, wantonly setting up combinations in matter which it knew would work out in cruelty and misery, and another co-ordinate though not quite equal Power interfering from the first to introduce into the combinations of the Elder Deity a slow but sure bias towards the good. Then we proposed an alternative hypothesis, logically simpler, though more difficult from the moral point of view. We conceived at the source of organic life an intelligent and well-

willing Power constrained, by some necessity "behind the veil," to carry out his purposes through the sluggish, refractory, hampering medium of matter. Supposing this Power free to act or to refrain from acting, we asked whether he could take the affirmative course—choose the "Everlasting Yea" as Carlyle would phrase it—without forfeiting our esteem and disqualifying for the post of Invisible King in the Wellsian sense of the term. In a tentative way, not exempt, perhaps, from a touch of special pleading, we advanced certain considerations which seemed to suggest that his decision to kindle the torch of life might, after all, be justified. Our provisional conclusion was that though, as at present advised, we might not quite see our way to hail him as a beneficent Invisible King, yet we need not go to the opposite extreme of writing him down a mere Ogre God, indifferent to the vast and purposeless process of groaning and travail, begetting and devouring, which he had wantonly initiated. That is the point at which we have now arrived.

I hope it need not be said I do not attribute any substantive value to the hypothetical myths here put forward and discussed—that I do not accept either of them, or propose that anyone else

should accept it, as a probable adumbration of what actually occurred "in the beginning"—a first chapter in a new Book of Genesis. My purpose was simply, since myth-making was the order of the day, to hint a criticism of Mr. Wells's myth, by placing beside it one or two other fantasies, perhaps as plausible as his, which had the advantage of not entirely eluding the question of origins. I submit, with great respect, that my Artificer comes a little less out of the blue than his Invisible King—that is all I claim for him.

But here Mr. Wells puts in a protest, not without indignation. Myth-making, he declares, is *not* the order of the day. Had he wanted to indulge in myth-making, he could easily have found some metaphysical affiliation for his Invisible King. What he has done is to record a profound spiritual experience, common to himself and many other good men and true, which has culminated in the recognition of an actual Power, objectively extant in the world, to which he has felt it a sacred duty to bear witness. Very good; so be it; let us now look more in detail into the gospel according to Wells.

IV

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

A GOSPEL it is, in all literalness; an evangel; a message of glad tidings. It is not merely *a* truth, it is "the Truth" (p. 1). Let there be no mistake about it: Mr. Wells's ambition is to rank with St. Paul and Mahomet, as the apostle of a new world-religion. He does not in so many words lay claim to inspiration, but it is almost inevitably deducible from his premises. He is uttering the first clear and definite tidings of a God who is endowed with personality, character, will and purpose. To that Deity he has submitted himself in enthusiastic devotion. If the God does not seize the opportunity to speak through such a marvellously suitable, such an ideal, mouthpiece, then practical common-sense cannot be one of his attributes. Which of the other Gods who have announced themselves from time to time has found such a megaphone to reverberate his voice? St. Paul was a poor tent-maker, whose sermons were not even

reported in the religious press, while his letters probably counted their public by scores, or at most by hundreds. Mr. Wells, from the outset of his mission, has the ear of two hemispheres.

What, then, does he tell us of his God? The first characteristic which differentiates him from all the other Gods with a big G—for of course we pay no heed to the departmental gods of polytheism—the first fact we must grasp and hold fast to, is that he lays no claim to infinity. "This new faith . . . worships *a finite God*" (p. 5; Mr. Wells's italics). "He has begun and he never will end" (p. 18). "He is within time and not outside it" (p. 7). Nothing can be more definite than that. There was a time when God did not exist; and then somehow, somewhen, he came into being.

Perhaps to ask "When?" would be to trespass on the department of origins, from which we are explicitly warned off. It would be to trench upon "cosmogony." Yet we are not quite without guidance. "The renascent religion," we are told, "has always been here; it has always been visible to those that had eyes to see" (p. 1). "Always," in this context, can only mean during the whole course of human history. Therefore God must

have come into being some time between the issue of the creative fiat and the appearance of man on the planet. This is a pretty wide margin, but it is something to go upon. He may have been contemporary with the amœba, or with the ichthyosaurus, or haply with the earliest quadrumana. At the very latest (if "always" is accurate) he must have made his appearance exactly at the same time as man; and if I were to give my opinion, I should say that was extremely probable. At all events, even if he preceded man by a few thousand or million years, we are compelled to assume that he came in preparation for the advent of the human species, determined to be on hand when wanted. For we do not gather that the lower animals stand in need of his services, or are capable of benefiting by them. One might be tempted to conceive him as guiding the course of evolution and hastening its laggard process; but (as we shall see) he scorns the rôle of Providence, and resolutely abstains from any intromission in organic or meteorological concerns. It would be pleasant to think that he had something to do with (for instance) the retreat of the ice-cap in the northern hemisphere; but we are not encouraged to indulge in any such speculation. It would appear that the

activity of God is purely psychical and moral—that he has no interest in biology, except as it influences, and is influenced by, sociology. In short, from all that one can make out, this God is strictly correlative to Man; and that is a significant fact which we shall do well to bear in mind.

As we have already seen, the Infinite (or Veiled) Being is not God (p. 13); nor is God the Life Force, the "impulse thrusting through matter and clothing itself in continually changing material forms . . . the Will to Be" (pp. 15–16). As we have also seen, Mr. Wells refuses to define the relation of his God, this "spirit," this "single spirit and single person," to either of these inscrutable entities. "God," he says, "comes to us neither out of the stars nor out of the pride of life, but as a still small voice within" (p. 18). It is by "faith" that we "find" him (p. 13); but Mr. Wells "doubts if faith can be complete and enduring if it is not secured by the definite knowledge of the true God" (p. 135). What, then, is "faith" in this context? It would be too much to say, with the legendary schoolboy, that it is "believing what you know isn't true." The implication seems rather to be that if you begin by believing on inadequate grounds, you will presently attain to

belief on adequate grounds, or, in other words, knowledge. Thus, when you go to a spiritual séance in a sceptical frame of mind, the chill of your aura frightens the spirits away, and you obtain no manifestations; but if you go in a mood of faith, which practically means confident expectation, the phenomena follow, and you depart a convert. I use this illustration in no scoffing spirit. The presupposition is not irrational. It amounts, in effect, to saying that you must go some way to meet God before God can or will come to you. This seems a curious coyness; but as God is finite and conditioned, a bit of a character ("a strongly marked and knowable personality," p. 5), there is nothing contradictory in it. Even when we read that "the true God goes through the world like fifes and drums and flags, calling for recruits along the street" (p. 40), we must not seize upon the letter of a similitude, and talk about inconsistency. You must go out to meet even the Salvation Army. It offers you salvation in vain if you obstinately bolt your door, and insist that an Englishman's house is his castle.

The finding of this God is very like what revivalists call "conversion" (p. 21). You are oppressed by "the futility of the individual life"; you fall

into "a state of helpless self-disgust" (p. 21); you are, in short, in the condition described by Hamlet when he says: "It goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors." The condition may result, as in Hamlet's case, from an untoward conjunction of outward circumstances; or it may be of physiological (liverish) origin. The methods of treatment are many—some of them (such as the administration of alcohol in large doses) disastrously unwise. In some states of society and periods of history, religion is the popular specific; and there have been, and are, forms of religion to which alcohol would be preferable. Fortunately, one can say without a shadow of hesitancy that "the modern religion" lies under no such suspicion. As dispensed by Mr. Wells, it is entirely wholesome. If it is found to cheer, it will certainly not inebriate. Indeed, the doubt one feels as to its popular success lies in the very fact that it contains but an innocuous proportion of alcohol.

You find yourself, then, in the distressful case described by Hamlet and Mr. Wells. "Man delights you not, no, nor woman neither." You cannot muster up energy even to kill King Claudius. You go about gloomily soliloquizing on suicide and kindred topics. Then, "in some way the idea of God comes into the distressed mind" (p. 21). It develops through various stages, outlined by Mr. Wells in the passage cited. In the modern man, it would seem, one great difficulty lies in "a curious resistance to the suggestion that God is truly a person" (p. 22). It is here, no doubt, that faith comes in; at all events, you ultimately get over this stumbling-block. "Then suddenly, in a little while, in his own time, God comes. The cardinal experience is an undoubting immediate sense of God. It is the attainment of an absolute certainty that one is not alone in oneself" (p. 23). You have come, in fact, to the gate of Damascus. You have found salvation.

Yes, salvation!—there is no other word for it. Mr. Wells does not hesitate to use both that word and its correlative, damnation. From what, then, are you saved? Why, from quite a number of things. You are saved "from the purposelessness of life" (p. 18). God's immortality has "taken

the sting from death" (p. 22). You have escaped "from the painful accidents and chagrins of individuation" (p. 73). "Salvation is to lose oneself" (p. 73); it is "a complete turning away from self" (p. 84). "Damnation is really over-individuation, and salvation is escape from self into the larger being of life" (p. 76). In another place we are told that salvation is "escape from the individual distress at disharmony and the individual defeat by death, into the Kingdom of God, and damnation can be nothing more and nothing less than the failure or inability or disinclination to make that escape" (p. 148). On the next page we have another definition of damnation (borrowed, it would seem, from Mr. Clutton Brock), with which I hasten to express my cordial and enthusiastic agreement: "*Satisfaction with existing things is damnation.*" I have always thought that hell was the headquarters of conservatism, and am delighted to find such influential backing for that pious opinion.

As for sin, it seems to be a falling away from the state of grace attained through conversion. You can and do sin while you are still unconverted; for we are told that "repentance is the beginning and essential of the religious life" (p. 165).

Probably (though this is not clear) your unregenerate condition is in itself sinful, "individuation" being not very different from the Original Sin of the theologians. But it is sin after regeneration that really matters. "Salvation leaves us still disharmonious, and adds not one inch to our spiritual and moral nature" (p. 146). "It is the amazing and distressful discovery of every believer so soon as the first exaltation of belief is past, that one does not remain always in touch with God" (p. 149). One blackslides. One reverts to one's unregenerate type. The old Adam makes disquieting resurgences in the swept and garnished mansion from which he seemed to have been for ever cast out. "This is the personal problem of Sin. *Here prayer avails; here God can help us*" (p. 150). And what is still more consoling, "though you sin seventy times seven times, God will still forgive the poor rest of you. . . . There is no sin, no state that, being regretted and repented of, can stand between God and man" (p. 156).

We shall have to consider later what useful purpose (if any) is served by this free-and-easy use of the dialect of revivalism. In the meantime, one would be sorry to seem to write without respect of the depth of conviction which Mr. Wells throws into

his account of the supreme spiritual experience of finding God. "Thereafter," he says, "one goes about the world like one who was lonely and has found a lover, like one who was perplexed and has found a solution" (pp. 23–24). God is a "huge friendliness, a great brother and leader of our little beings" (p. 24). "He is a stimulant; he makes us live immortally and more abundantly. I have compared him to the sensation of a dear strong friend who comes and stands quietly beside one, shoulder to shoulder" (p. 39). It certainly takes some courage for a modern Englishman, not by profession a licensed dealer in spiritual sentimentality, to write like this.

And now comes the question, What does God do? What does he aim at? And how does he effect his purposes? The answer seems to be that, in a literal, tangible sense, he does nothing. He operates solely in and through the mind of man; and even through the mind of man he does not influence external events. This, it may be said, is impossible, since all those external events which we call human conduct flow from the mind of man. Perhaps it would be correct to say (for here Mr. Wells gives us no explicit guidance) that external events are only a by-product of the influence of God: that,

having begotten a certain spiritual state which he feels to be generally desirable, he takes no responsibility for the particular consequences that are likely to flow from it. So, at least, one can best interpret Mr. Wells's repeated disclaimer of the idea that "God is Magic or God is Providence" (p. 27), that "all the time, incalculably, he is pulling about the order of events for our personal advantages" (p. 35–6). Commenting on Mr. Edwyn Bevan's phrase for God, "the Friend behind phenomena," Mr. Wells insists that the expression "carries with it no obligation whatever to believe that this Friend is in control of the phenomena" (p. 87). Perhaps not; but it is a question for after consideration whether lucidity is promoted by giving the name God to a Power which has no power —which does not seem even to make directly purposive use of the influence which it possesses over the minds of believers. Once, in a coasting steamer on the Pacific, I nearly died of sea-sickness. A friend was with me, the soul of kindness, such a lovable old man that I write this down partly for the pleasure of recalling him. He used to come to my cabin every hour or so, shake his head mournfully, and go away again. I felt his good will and was grateful for it; but it would be affecta-

tion to pretend that I would not have been still more grateful had he possessed some "control of phenomena"—had he brought with him a remedy. Since those days, more than one efficacious preventive of sea-sickness has been discovered; and I own to counting the nameless chemists who have achieved this marvel among the most authentic friends to poor humanity of whom we have any knowledge. Where is the God (as Mr. Zangwill has pertinently enquired) who will give us a cure for cancer?

This, however, is a digression, or at any rate an anticipation. What the Invisible King actually does, without meddling with phenomena, is to assume the "captaincy" of the "racial adventure" in which we are engaged (p. 76). "God must love his followers as a great captain loves his men . . . whose faith alone makes him possible. It is an austere love. The Spirit of God will not hesitate to send us to torment and bodily death" (p. 67). And what is this "racial adventure"? It is, in the first place, the achievement of Mr. Wells's political ideals—an object which has all my sympathy, since they happen to be, generally speaking, my own. "As a knight in God's service," says Mr. Wells, "I take sides against injustice, disorder, and against

all those temporal kings, emperors, princes, landlords, and owners, who set themselves up against God's rule and worship" (p. 97). By all means! Only one does not see how, if the kings, emperors and landlords declare that they, too, have found God, and found him on the side of monarchy and landlordism, this contention of theirs is to be confuted. If God does not control phenomena, the actual controllers of events will be able to maintain in the future, as in the past, that he is on the side of the big battalions—an argument which it will be hard to meet, except by raising bigger battalions. In the meantime we have to note that God's political opinions are only provisional, and that he himself is open to conviction. "The first purpose of God is the attainment of clear knowledge, of knowledge as a means to more knowledge, and of knowledge as a means to power" (p. 98–9). And the object to which he will apply this power is "the conquest of death: first the overcoming of death in the individual by the incorporation of the motives of his life into an undying purpose, and then the defeat of that death which seems to threaten our species upon a cooling planet beneath a cooling sun" (p. 99). Ultimately, then, it would seem that God does intend to undertake the control of

phenomena. Dealing with ice-caps is not so entirely outside his province as one had hastily assumed. The Invisible King is not, after all, a *roi fainéant*. He will begin to do things as soon as he knows how: any other course would be obviously rash. One would like to live a few hundred thousand years, to see him come into overt action. Yet, in this far-reaching program, there seems to lurk a certain contradiction, or at least an ambiguity. If, for the believer in God, death has, here and now, lost its sting—if "we come staggering through into the golden light of his kingdom, to fight for his kingdom henceforth, until, at last, we are altogether taken up into his being" (p. 68)—one does not quite see the reason for this long campaign against death. Surely the logical consummation would be an ultimate racial euthanasia, an absorption of humanity into God, a vast apotheosis-nirvana, after which the earth and sun could go on cooling at their leisure.

Apart from one or two irrepressible "asides," I have attempted in this chapter to let Mr. Wells speak for himself, proclaim the faith that is in him, and draw the portrait of his God. Many details are of course omitted, for which the reader

must turn to the original text. He will find it a pleasant and profitable task. The remainder of my present undertaking falls into three parts. First I must ask the reader to consider with me whether Mr. Wells's gospel can be accepted as a real addition to knowledge, like (say) the discovery of radium, or whether it is only a re-description in new language (or old language slightly refurbished) of familiar facts of spiritual experience. In the second place, assuming that we have to fall back on the latter alternative, we shall enquire whether anything would be gained by the general acceptance of this new-old, highly emotionalized terminology. Thirdly, I shall venture to suggest that when Mr. Wells says "The first purpose of God is the attainment of clear knowledge, of knowledge as a means to more knowledge, and of knowledge as a means to power," he is only choosing a mythological way of expressing the fact that if God (in the ordinary, non-Wellsian sense of the word) is ever to be found, it must be through patient investigation of the phenomena in which he clothes himself.

V

WHEN IS A GOD NOT A GOD?

THOUGH many of Mr. Wells's asseverations of the substantive reality of his Invisible King have been quoted above, it would be easy to lengthen their array. There is nothing on which he is so insistent. For example, "God is no abstraction nor trick of words. . . .[1] He is as real as a bayonet thrust or an embrace" (p. 56). And again, on the same page: "He feels us and knows us; he is helped and gladdened by us. He hopes and attempts." There is no limit to the anthropomorphism of the language which Mr. Wells currently employs. Or rather, there is only one limit: he disclaims the notion that his God is actually existent in space, that he has parts and dimensions, and inhabits a form in any way analogous to ours. He is the Invisible King, not merely, like the

[1] The words here omitted, "no Infinite," are nothing to the present purpose. Mr. Wells has started by making this declaration, which we accept without difficulty. No one will suspect the Invisible King of being an "Infinite" in disguise.

Spanish Fleet, because he "is not yet in sight," but because he has no material or "astral" integument. Being outside space (though inside time) he can be omnipresent (p. 61). But of course Mr. Wells would not pretend that no deity can be called anthropomorphic who is not actually conceived as incarnate in the visible figure of a man. An anthropomorphic God is one who reflects the mental characteristics of his worshippers; and that Mr. Wells's God does, if ever God did in this world.

Yet almost in the same breath in which he is claiming for his God the fullest independent reality —thinking of him "as having moods and aspects, as a man has, and a consistency we call his character" (p. 63)—he will use language implying that he is that very abstraction of the better parts of human nature which has been proposed for worship in all the various "religions of humanity," "ethical churches," and so forth, for two or three generations past. Listen to this: "Though he does not exist in matter or space, he exists in time, just as a current of thought may do; he changes and becomes more even as a man's thought gathers itself together; somewhere in the dawning of mankind he had a beginning, an awakening, and as mankind grows he grows. . . . *He is the undying*

human memory, the increasing human will" (p. 61). When, in the last chapter, I discussed the date of the divinity's birth, I had overlooked this text. Here we have it in black and white that he did not precede mankind—that, of course, would have implied independence—but began with the "dawning" of the race, and has grown with its growth. Moreover, the analogy of a "current of thought" is expressly suggested—reinforcing the suspicion which has all along haunted us that the God of Mr. Wells is nothing else than what is known to less mythopœic thinkers as a "stream of tendency." But Mr. Wells will by no means have it so. Indeed he evidently regards this as the most annoying, and perhaps damnable, of heresies. On the very next page he proceeds to rule out the suggestion that "God is the collective mind and purpose of the human race." "You may declare," he says, "that this is no God, but merely the sum of mankind. But those who believe in the new ideas very steadfastly deny that. God is, they say, not an aggregate but a synthesis." And he goes on to suggest various analogies: a temple is more than a gathering of stones, a regiment more than an accumulation of men: we do not love the soil of our back garden, or the chalk of Kent, or the limestone

of Yorkshire; yet we love England, which is made up of these things. So God is more than the sum or essence of the nobler impulses of the race: he is a spirit, a person, a friend, a great brother, a captain, a king: he "is love and goodness" (p 80); and without him the Service of Man is "no better than a hobby, a sentimentality or a hypocrisy" (p. 95).

Let us reflect a little upon these analogies, and see whether they rest on any solid basis. Why is a temple more than a heap of stones? Because human intelligence and skill have entered into the stones and organized them to serve a given purpose or set of purposes: to delight the eye, to elevate the mind, to express certain ideas, to afford shelter for worshippers against wind, rain and sun. Why is a regiment more than a mob? Again because it has been deliberately and elaborately organized to fulfil certain functions. Why is England more than the mere rocks of which it is composed? Because these materials have been grouped, partly by nature, but very largely by the labor of untold generations of our fathers, into forms which give pleasure to the eye and appeal to our most intimate and cherished associations. Besides, when we speak of "England," we do not think

only or mainly of its physical aspects. We think of it as a great community, with an ancient, and in some ways admirable, tradition of political life, with a splendid record of achievement in both material and spiritual things, with a great past, and (we hope) a greater future. In all these cases the parts have been fused into a whole by human effort, either consciously or instinctively applied; and it is in virtue of this effort alone that the whole transcends its parts. But in the case of a God "synthetized" out of the thought and feeling of untold generations of men, the analogy breaks down at every point. To assume that portions of psychic experience are capable of vital coalescence, is to beg the whole question. We know that stone can be piled on stone, that men can be trained to form a platoon, a cohort, a phalanx; but that detached fragments of mind are capable of any sort of cohesion and organization we do not know at all. And, even if this point could be granted, where is the organizing power? We should have to postulate another God to serve as the architect or the drill-sergeant of our synthetic divinity. Nor would it help matters to suggest that the God (as it were) crystallized himself; for that is to assume structural potentialities in his component parts which must

have come from somewhere, so that again we have to presuppose another God. It is true, no doubt, that portions of thought and feeling can be collected, arranged, edited, in some sense organized, by human effort; but the result is an encyclopædia, a thesaurus, an anthology, a liturgy, a bible—not a God. It may, like the Vedas, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Koran, become an object of idolatry; but even its idolaters see in it only an emanation from God, not the God himself. All this argument may strike the reader as extremely nebulous, but I submit that the fault is not mine. It was not I who sought to demonstrate the reality of a figure of speech by placing it on all fours with a cathedral and a regiment. The whole contention is so baffling that reason staggers and flounders as in a quicksand. It rests upon a mixture of categories, as palpable and yet as elusive as anything in *The Hunting of the Snark.*

If you tell me that Public Opinion is a God, I am quite willing to consider whether the metaphor is a luminous and helpful one. But if you protest that it is no metaphor at all, but a literal statement of fact, like the statement that Mr. Woodrow Wilson is President of the United States, I no longer know where we are. Mr. Wells's "undying

human memory and increasing human will" cannot exactly be identified with Public Opinion, but it belongs to the same order of ideas. Here there is an actual workable analogy. But there is no practicable analogy between a purely mental concept and a physical construction. You will not help me to believe in (say) the doctrine of Original Sin, by assuring me that it is built, like the Tower Bridge, on the cantilever principle.

It is quite certain that, if passionate conviction and the free use of anthropomorphic language can make a figure of speech a God, the Invisible King is an individual entity, as detached from Mr. Wells as Michelangelo's Moses from Michelangelo. Paradoxically enough, he has put on "individuation" that his worshippers may escape from it. Mr. Wells's book teems with expressions—I have given many examples of them—which are wholly inapplicable to any metaphor, however galvanized into a semblance of life by ecstatic contemplation in the devotional mind. For example, when we are told that it is doubtful whether "God knows all, or much more than we do, about the ultimate Being," the mere assertion of a doubt implies the possibility of knowledge of a quite different order from any that exists in the human intelligence.

Mr. Wells explicitly assures us that knowledge of the Veiled Being is (for the present at any rate) inaccessible to our faculties; but he implies that such knowledge *may* be possessed by the Invisible King; and as knowledge cannot possibly be a synthesis of ignorances, it follows that the Invisible King has powers of apprehension quite different from, and independent of, any operation of the human brain. These powers may not, as a matter of fact, have solved the enigma of existence; but it is clearly implied that they might conceivably do so; and indeed the text positively asserts that God knows *something* more of the Veiled Being than we do, though perhaps not "much." In view of this passage, and many others of a like nature, we cannot fall back on the theory that Mr. Wells is merely trying, by dint of highly imaginative writing, to infuse life into a deliberate personification, like Robespierre's Goddess of Reason or Matthew Arnold's Zeitgeist. However difficult it may be, we must accustom ourselves to the belief that his assertions of the personal existence of his God represent the efficient element in his thought, and that if other passages seem inconsistent with that idea—seem to point to mere abstraction or allegorization of the mind of the race—it is these

passages, and not the more full-blooded pronouncements, that must be cancelled as misleading or inadequate. There can be no doubt that the God to whom Mr. Wells seeks to convert us is (in his apostle's conception) much more of a President Wilson than of a Zeitgeist.

It would be possible, of course, for a God, however dubious and even inconceivable the method of his "synthesis," to manifest himself in his effects —to prove his existence by his actions. But this, as we have seen, the Invisible King scorns to do. His adherents, we are told, "advance no proof whatever of the existence of God but their realization of him" (p. 98). There is a sort of implication that the Deity will not descend to vulgar miracle-working. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it" —not even "the sign of Jonah the prophet."

But to ask for some sort of visible or plausibly conjecturable effect is not at all the same thing as to ask for miracles. Mr. Wells proclaims with all his might that the Invisible King works the most marvellous and beneficent changes in the minds of his devotees; why, then, do these changes produce no recognizable effect on the course of events? The

God who can work upon the human mind has the key to the situation in his hands—why, then, does he make such scant use of it? Is God only a luxury for the intellectually wealthy? The champagne of the spiritual life? A stimulant and anodyne highly appreciated in the best circles, but inaccessible to the man of small spiritual means, whether he be a dweller in palaces or in the slums?

To say that a given Power can and does potently affect the human mind, and yet cannot, or at least does not, produce any appreciable or demonstrable effect on the external aspects of human life, is like asking us to believe that a man is a heaven-born conductor who can get nothing out of his orchestra but discords and cacophonies.

Mr. Wells may perhaps reply that his God *does* recognizably influence the course of events—indeed, that everything in history which we see to be good and desirable is the work of the Invisible King—but that he does not advance this fact as a proof of God's existence, because it is discernible only to the eye of faith and cannot be brought home to unregenerate reason. I do not imagine that he will take this line, for it would come dangerously near to identifying God with Providence—a heresy which he abhors. But supposing some other adept

in "modern religion" were to make this claim on behalf of the Invisible King, would it go any way towards persuading us that we owe him our allegiance?

The assumption would be, as I understand it, that of a finite God, unable to modify the operations of matter, but with an unlimited, or at any rate a very great, power of influencing the workings of the human mind. He would have no control over meteorological conditions: he could not "ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm"; he could not subdue the earthquake or prevent the Greenland glacier from "calving" icebergs into the Atlantic. He could not release the human body from the rhythms of growth and decay; he could not eradicate that root of all evil, the association of consciousness with a mechanism requiring to be constantly stoked with a particular sort of fuel which exists only in limited quantities. If God could arrange for life to be maintained on a diet of inorganic substances—if he could enable animals, like plants, to go direct to minerals and gases for their sustenance, instead of having it, so to speak, half-digested in the vegetable kingdom—or even if, under the present system, he could make fecundity, in any given species, automatically pro-

portionate to the supply of food—he would at one stroke refashion earthly life in an extremely desirable sense. But this we assume to be beyond his competence: the Veiled Being has autocratically imposed the struggle for existence as an inexorable condition of the Invisible King's activities, except in so far as it can be eluded by and through the human intelligence. His problem, then, will be to guide the minds of men towards a realization that their higher destiny lies in using their intelligence to substitute ordered co-operation for the sanguinary competition above which merely instinctive organism are incapable of rising.

Observe that in exercising this power of psychical influence there would be no sort of miracle-working, no interference with the order of nature. The influence of mind upon mind, even without the intervention of words or other symbols, is a part of the order of nature which no one to-day dreams of questioning. Hypnotic suggestion is a department of orthodox medical practice, and telepathy is more and more widely admitted, if only as a refuge from the hypothesis of survival after death. If, then, we have a divine mind applying itself to the problems of humanity, and capable of suggesting ideas to the mind of man—appealing, as a "still

small voice" (p. 18), to his intelligence, his emotions and his will—one cannot but figure its power for good as almost illimitable. What is to prevent it from achieving a very rapid elimination of the ape and the tiger, the Junker and the Tory, and substituting social enthusiasms for individual passions as the motive-power of human conduct? We may admit that the brain of man must first be developed up to a certain point before divine suggestion could effectively work upon it. But we know that men and races of magnificent brain-power must have existed on the planet thousands and thousands of years ago. What, then, has the Invisible King made of his opportunities?

Frankly, he has made a terrible hash of them. It is hard to see how the progress of the race could possibly have been slower, more laborious, more painful than in fact it has been. No doubt there have been a few splendid spurts, which we may, if we please, trace to the genial goading of the Invisible King. But all the great movements have dribbled away into frustration and impotence. There was, for example, the glorious intellectual efflorescence of Greece. There, you may say, the Invisible King was almost visibly at work. But, after all, what a flash-in-the-pan it was! Hellas

was a little island of light surrounded by gloomy immensities of barbarism; yet, instead of stablishing and fortifying a political cosmos, its leading men had nothing better to do than to plunge into the bloody chaos of the Peloponnesian War, and set back the clock of civilization by untold centuries. What was the Invisible King about when that catastrophe happened? Similarly, the past two centuries, and especially the past seventy-five years, have witnessed a marvellous onrush in man's intellectual apprehension of the universe and mastery over the latent energies of matter. But because moral and political development has lagged hopelessly behind material progress, the world is plunged into a war of unexampled magnitude and almost unexampled fury, wherein the heights of the air and depths of the sea are pressed into the service of slaughter. Where was the Invisible King in July, 1914? Or, for that matter, what has he been doing since July, 1870? "Either he was musing, or he was on a journey, or peradventure he slept." Truly it would seem that he might have advised Mr. Wells to wait for the "Cease fire!" before proclaiming his godhead.

Of course Mr. Wells will remind me that he claims for him no material potency; and I must

own that no happier moment could have been chosen for the annunciation of an impotent God. But the plea does not quite tally with the facts. In the first place (as we have seen) the Invisible King is *going* to do things—he is going to do very remarkable things as soon as he knows how. And in the second place it is impossible to conceive that the tremendous psychical influence which is claimed for this God can be exercised without producing external reactions. Why, he is actually stated to be—like another God, his near relative, whom he rather unkindly disowns—he is stated to be "the light of the world" (p. 18). Is there any meaning in such a statement if it be not pertinent to ask what sort of light has led the world into the ghastly quagmire in which it is to-day agonizing? The truth is that Mr. Wells attributes to his God powers which, even if he had no greater knowledge than Mr. Wells himself possesses, could be used to epoch-making advantage. Fancy an omnipresent H. G. Wells, able to speak in a still small voice to all men of good-will throughout the world! What a marvellous revolution might he not effect! Mr. Wells himself has outlined such a revolution in one of his most thoughtful romances, *In the Days of the Comet.* From the fact that it does

not occur, may we not fairly suspect that the Invisible King is a creation of the same mythopœic faculty which engendered the wonder-working comet with its aura of sweet-reasonableness?

If we turn to Mr. Britling, we find that that eminent publicist was distressed by a sense of the difficulty of conveying God's message to the world; only he modestly attributed it to defects in his own equipment rather than to powerlessness on the part of God. We read on page 427:—"Never had it been so plain to Mr. Britling that he was a weak, silly, ill-informed and hasty-minded writer, and never had he felt so invincible a conviction that the Spirit of God was in him, and that it fell to him to take some part in the establishment of a new order of living upon the earth. . . . Always he seemed to be on the verge of some illuminating and beautiful statement of his cause; always he was finding his writing inadequate, a thin treachery to the impulse of his heart." Have we not in such an experience an irrefutable proof of the inefficacy of Mr. Britling's God? Always the world has been all ears for a clear, convincing, compulsive message from God; always, or at any rate for many thousands of years, there have been men who seemed the predestined mouthpieces of such a

message; always what purported to be the word of God has proved to be either powerless to make itself heard, or powerful only to the begetting of hideous moral and social corruptions. God spoke (it is said) through the Vedic *rishis,* the sages of the Himalayas—and the result has been caste, cow-worship, suttee, abominations of asceticism, and nameless orgies of sensuality. God spoke through Moses, and the result was—Judaism! God spoke through Jesus, and the result was Arianism and Athanasianism, the Papacy, the Holy Office, the Thirty Years' War, massacres beyond computation, and the slowly calcined flesh of an innumerable army of martyrs. All this, no doubt, was due to gross and palpable misunderstanding of the message delivered through Jesus; but since it was so fatally open to misunderstanding, would it not better have remained undelivered? Could the world have been appreciably worse off without it? The question is rather an idle one, since it turns on "might have beens." That the element of good in the message of Jesus has been to some extent efficient, no one would deny. But the alloy of potential evil has made itself so overpoweringly actual that to strike a balance between the two forces is impossible, and the question is generally decided

by throwing a solid chunk of prejudice into one scale or the other.

There has never been a time when a really well-informed revelation, uttered with charm and power, might not have revolutionized the world. "A well-informed revelation!" the reader may cry: "What terrible bathos!" Mr. Wells, moreover, speaks slightingly of revelation (pp. 19, 163) in a tone that seems to imply that "modern religion" would have nothing to do with it even if it could. But the demand for a revelation is eminently reasonable and justified; and the only trouble about the historic revelations is that they have all been so shockingly ill-informed, and have revealed nothing to the purpose. Robert Louis Stevenson anticipated Mr. Wells's view of the matter when he wrote ironically:—

> It's a simple thing that I demand,
> Though humble as can be—
> A statement fair in my Maker's hand
> To a gentleman like me—
>
> A clean account, writ fair and broad,
> And a plain apologee—
> Or deevil a ceevil word to God
> From a gentleman like me.

But why this irony? What an infinity of trouble and pain would have been saved if such a "clean

account, writ fair and broad," had been vouchsafed, and had been found to tally with the facts! Nor have the reputedly wise and good of this world seen any presumption in desiring such a *communiqué*. Most of them thought they had received it, and many wasted half their lives in attempting to reconcile new knowledge with old ignorance, promulgated under the guarantee of God. I cannot but think that the poet got nearer the heart of the matter who wrote:—

> Was Moses upon Sinai taught
> How Sinai's mighty ribs were wrought?
> Did Buddha, 'neath the bo-tree's shade,
> Learn how the stars were poised and swayed?
>
> Did Jesus still pain's raging storm,
> And dower the world with chloroform?
> Or Mahomet a jehad decree
> 'Gainst microbe-harboring gnat and flea?
>
> Has revelation e'er revealed
> Aught from its age and hour concealed?
> Or miracle, since time began,
> Conferred a single boon on Man?

Truly, we may agree with Mr. Wells that the Invisible King was probably not in the secrets of the Veiled Being, else he could scarcely have kept them so successfully. But have we any use for a God who can teach us nothing? who has to be

taught by us before he can do anything worth mentioning? The old Gods who professed to teach were much more rational in theory, if only their teaching had not been all wrong. Man has built up his knowledge of the universe he lives in by slow, laborious degrees, not helped, but constantly and cruelly hindered, by his Gods. Yet Mr. Wells will surely not deny that an approximately true conception of the process of nature, and of his own origin and history, was an indispensable basis for all right and lasting social construction. What colossal harm has been wrought, for instance, by the fairy-tale of the Fall, and all its theological consequences! Yet, age after age, the Invisible King did nothing to shake its calamitous prestige. Of late it is true that the progress of knowledge has seemed no longer slow, but amazingly rapid; but that is because the amount of energy devoted to it has been multiplied a hundredfold. Each new step is still a very short one: it is generally found that several investigators have independently arrived at the verge of a new discovery, and it is often a matter of chance which of them first crosses the line and is lucky enough to associate his name with the completed achievement. All this means that to-day, as from the be-

ginning, man has to wring her secrets from Nature in the sweat of his brain, and without the smallest assistance from any Invisible King or other potentate. To-day there are doubtless beneficent secrets under our very noses, so to speak, which one word of a still small voice might enable us to grasp, but which may remain undiscovered, to our great detriment, for centuries to come. There is, in short, no single point, either in history or in contemporary life, where "the light of the world" can be shown, or plausibly conjectured, to have lighted us to any practical purpose. And it is futile to urge, I repeat, that it could not have done so without a miraculous disturbance of the order of nature. The influence of mind upon mind, however conveyed, is the most natural thing in the world; and, short of transplanting mountains, inhibiting earthquakes, and teaching people to subsist on air, there is nothing that mind cannot do.

Besides, when we come to think of it, why this prejudice against miracles? Why is Mr. Wells so sternly opposed to the bare idea of Providence? "Fear and feebleness," he says, "go straight to the Heresies that God is Magic or that God is Providence" (p. 27)—as though it were disgracefully pusillanimous to prefer a well-governed to an un-

governed world. God, in the ordinary sense of the word, the sense we all understand, is unquestionably magic, whether we like it or not. He is none the less magic because he works through one great spell, and not through a host of minor, petti-fogging miracles. Upon the matter of fact we are all agreed, Mr. Chesterton only dissenting; but Mr. Wells writes as if it were an essentially godlike thing, and greatly to the credit of any and every God, to give Nature its head, and take no further trouble about the matter. I cannot share that view. My only objection to Providence is that it manifestly does not exist. If it did exist, and made the world an appreciably better place to live in, why should we grudge it a few miracles? There is a touch of the sour-grapes philosophy in the rationalist attitude on this matter which Mr. Wells attributes to his Invisible King. Because we can't have any miracles, we say we don't want them. Also, no doubt, we see that the alleged miracles of the past were childish futilities, doing at most a little temporary good to individuals, never rendering any permanent service to a city or a nation, and much less to mankind at large. They were a sort of niggardly alms from omnipotence, not a generous endowment or a liberal compensa-

tion. But is that any reason why an intelligent Power should be unable to devise a really helpful miracle? Another plausible objection is that, even if we could admit the justice of a system of rewards and punishments, good and evil are so inextricably intermixed in this world that it is impossible to distribute benefits on a satisfactory moral scheme. It is impossible to manipulate the rainfall so that the righteous farmer shall have just what he wants at the appropriate seasons, while his wicked neighbour suffers from alternate drought and floods; nor can it be arranged that the midday express shall convey all the good people safely, while the 4.15, which is wrecked, carries none but undesirable characters. To this it might be replied that the inconceivable complexity of the chess-board of the world exists only in relation to our human faculties; but what is far more to the point is the indubitable fact that many salutary miracles might be wrought which would raise no question whatever as to the moral merits or defects of the beneficiaries. Miracles of alleged justice may reasonably be deprecated; but where is the objection to miracles of mercy, falling, like the blessed rain from heaven, on both just and unjust?

The haughty soul of Mr. Wells may prefer a

deity who offers us no tangible bribes—who not only does not work miracles, but will not even utilize to material ends that great system of wireless telegraphy between his mind and ours which he has, by hypothesis, at his disposal. Mine, I confess, is a humbler spirit. I should be perfectly willing to accept even thaumaturgic benefits if only they came in my way; and I cannot regard it as a merit in a God that he should carefully abstain from using even his powers of suggestion to do some practical good in the world, and, incidentally, to demonstrate his own existence.

It is difficult, in the course of a long discussion, to keep the attention fixed on the precise point at issue. I therefore sum up in a few words the argument of this chapter.

In the first place, I have shown that, if words mean anything, Mr. Wells does actually wish us to believe that his God is not a figure of speech, but a person, an individual, as real and independent an entity as the Kaiser or President Wilson. In the second place, I have enquired whether anything he says enables us to conceive *à priori* the possibility of such an entity disengaging itself from

the mind of the race, and have regretfully been led to the conclusion that the genesis of this God remains at least as insoluble a mystery as that of any other God ever placed before a confiding public. Thirdly, I have approached the question *à posteriori* and enquired whether history or present experience offers any evidence from which we can reasonably infer the existence and activity of such a God—arriving once more at a negative conclusion. With the best will in the world, I can discover nothing in this Invisible King but a sort of new liqueur—or old liqueur with a new label—suited, no doubt, to the constitutions of certain very exceptional people. Mr. Wells avers that he himself finds it supremely grateful and comforting, and further appeals to the testimony of a number of other (unnamed) believers—"English, Americans, Bengalis, Russians, French . . . Positivists, Baptists, Sikhs, Mohammedans" (p. 4)—a quaint Pentecostal gathering. It is true, of course, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and of the liqueur in the drinking. But some of us are inveterately sceptical of the virtues of alcohol, even in non-intoxicant doses, and are apt to think that the man who discovers a remedy for sea-sickness

or a prophylactic against typhoid is a greater benefactor of the race than a God whose special characteristic it is to be not only invisible himself but equally imperceptible in his workings.

VI

FOR AND AGAINST PERSONIFICATION

FOR those of us who cannot accept Mr. Wells's Invisible King as a God in any useful or even comprehensible sense of the term, there remains the question whether he is a useful figure of speech. Metaphors and personifications are often things of great potency, whether for good or evil. It might quite well happen that, if we wholly rejected Mr. Wells's gospel, on account of a mere squabble as to the meaning of the word "God," we should thereby lose something which might have been of the utmost value to us. Let us not run the risk of throwing out the baby with the bath-water.

Take the case of a very similar personification with which we are all familiar—to wit, John Bull. Is he a helpful or a detrimental "synthesis"? It is not quite easy to say. There is a certain geniality, a bluff wholesomeness, a downright honesty about him, which has doubtless its value;

but on the other hand he is the incarnation of Philistinism and Toryism, the perfect expression of the average sensual man. I am told that in one of his avatars he has something like two million worshippers, on whom his influence is of the most questionable, precisely because they have implicit "faith" in him, and regard him as a "Friend behind phenomena," a "great brother," a "strongly marked and knowable personality, loving, inspiring, and lovable." That is an illustration of the dangers which may lurk in prosopopœia. But in the main we can regard John Bull without too much misgiving, because we cannot regard him seriously. His worship will always be seasoned with the saving grace of humor. He can do service in two capacities—sometimes as an ideal, often as a deterrent. Whatever religious revolutions may await us, we are not likely to see St. Paul's Cathedral solemnly re-dedicated to the worship of John Bull. He and his sister divinity, Mrs. Grundy, have never lacked adorers in that basilica; but their cult is probably not on the increase.

The Invisible King, on the other hand, is a personage to be taken with the utmost seriousness. If he has anything like the success Mr. Wells anticipates for him, it is quite on the cards that he

might oust the present Reigning Family from one or all of the cathedrals. It is true that Mr. Wells deprecates any ritual worship; but "religious thought finely expressed" would always be in order; and he "does not see why there should not be, under God, associations for building cathedrals and such like great still places urgent with beauty, into which men and women may go to rest from the clamor of the day's confusions" (p. 168). If cathedrals may be built, all the more clearly may they be appropriated—if you can convert or evict the dean and chapter. If the Invisible King should take the fancy of the nation and the world, as Mr. Wells would have us think that he is already doing, he is bound to become the object of a formal cult. We shall very soon see a prayer-book of the "modern religion" with marriage, funeral and perhaps baptismal services, with daily lessons, and with suitable forms of prayer for persons who cannot trust themselves to extempore communings even with a "great brother."

Well, there might be no great harm in this. Some solemn form for the expression of cosmic, and even of mundane or political, emotion would doubtless be useful; and if the "modern religion" could be saved from degenerating into a hysterical

superstition on the one hand, or a petrified, persecuting orthodoxy on the other, it would certainly be a vast improvement on many of the religions of to-day.

But the ambitions of the Invisible King go far beyond the mere presidency of an Ethical Church on an extended scale. He is to be a King and no mistake; not even a King of Kings, but "sole Monarch of the universal earth." Autocracies, oligarchies, and democracies are alike to be swept out of his path. The "implicit command" of the modern religion "to all its adherents is to make plain the way to the world theocracy" (p. 97). How the fiats of the Invisible King are to be issued, we are not informed. If through the ballot-box—"vox populi, vox dei"—then the distinction between theocracy and democracy will scarcely be apparent to the naked eye. And one does not see how, in the transition stage at any rate, recourse to the ballot-box is to be avoided, if only as a lesser evil than recourse to howitzers, tanks and submarines. We read that "if you do not feel God then there is no persuading you of him"; but if you do, "you will realize more and more clearly, that thus and thus and no other is his method and intention" (p. 98). Now, assuming (no slight as-

sumption) that the oracles of God, the message of the still small voice, will be identically interpreted by all believers, the unbelievers, those who "do not feel God," have still to be dealt with; and, as they are not open to persuasion, it would seem that the faithful must be prepared either to shoot them down or to vote them down—whereof the latter seems the humaner alternative. It is true that Mr. Wells's God is a man of war; like that other whom he disowns but strangely resembles, "he brings mankind not rest but a sword" (p. 96). But we may confidently hold that this, at any rate, is but a manner of speaking. Even if the God is real, his sword is metaphoric. Mr. Wells is not seriously proposing to take his cue from his Mohammedan friends, raise the cry of "Allahu Akbar!" and propagate his gospel scimitar in hand. It is hard to see, then, what other method there can be of dealing with the heathen, except the method of the ballot-box—of course with proportional representation. When there are no more heathen—when the whole world can read the will of God by direct intuition, as though it were written in letters of fire across the firmament—then, indeed, the ballot-box may join the throne, sceptre and crown in the historical museum. But even the robust optimism of

the *gottestrunken* Mr. Wells can scarcely conceive this millennium to be at hand. So that in the meantime it seems unwise to speak slightingly of democracy, lest we thereby help the Powers, both here and elsewhere, which are fighting for something very much worse. For I take it that the worst enemy of the Wellsian God is the Superman, who has quite a sporting chance of coming out on top, if not actually in this War, at least in the welter that will succeed it.

But seriously, is any conceivable sort of theocracy a desirable ideal? Or, to put the same question in more general terms, is it wise of Mr. Wells to make such play with the word "God"? He himself admits that "God trails with him a thousand misconceptions and bad associations: his alleged infinite nature, his jealousy, his strange preferences, his vindictive Old Testament past" (p. 8)—and, it may fairly be added, his blood-boltered, Kultur-stained present. Is it possible to deodorize a word which comes to us redolent of "good, thick stupefying incense-smoke," mingled with the reek of the auto-da-fé? Can we beat into a ploughshare the sword of St. Bartholomew, and a thousand other deeds of horror? God has been by far the most tragic word in the whole vocabulary of

the race—a spell to conjure up all the worst fiends in human nature: arrogance and abjectness, fanaticism, hatred and atrocity. Religious reformers—with Jesus at their head—have time and again tried to divest it of some, at least, of its terrors, but they have invariably failed. Will Mr. Wells succeed any better? Is it not apparent in the foregoing discussion that, even if the word had no other demerits, it leads us into regions in which the mind can find no firm foothold? I have done my best to accept Mr. Wells's definitions, but I am sure he feels that I have constantly slipped from the strait and narrow path. Has he himself always kept to it? I think not. And, waiving that point, is it at all likely that people in general will be more successful than I have been in grasping and holding fast to the differentiating attributes of Mr. Wells's divinity? If the word is at best a confusion and at worst a war-whoop, should we not try to dispense with it, to avoid it, to find a substitute which should more accurately, if less truculently, express our idea? Is it wise or kind to seek to impose on the future an endless struggle with its sinister ambiguities?

There are, no doubt, regions of thought from which it is extremely difficult to exclude the word;

but these, fortunately, are regions in which it is almost necessarily divested of its historical associations. As a term of pure philosophy, if safeguarded by careful definition, it is a convenient piece of shorthand, obviating the necessity for a constant recourse to cumbrous formulas. But politics is not one of these regions of thought; and it is precisely in politics that the intervention of God has from of old been most disastrous. "Theocracy" has always been the synonym for a bleak and narrow, if not a fierce and blood-stained, tyranny. Why seek to revive and rehabilitate a word of such a dismal connotation? I suggest that even if the Invisible King *were* a God, it would be tactful to pretend that he was not. As he is *not* a God, in any generally understood sense of the term, it seems a curious perversity to pretend that he is.

Even in the region of morals it is a backward step to restore God to the supremacy from which he has with the utmost difficulty been deposed. I am sure Mr. Wells does not in his heart believe that any theological sanction is required for the plain essentials of social well-doing, or any theological stimulus for the rare sublimities of virtue.

Incalculable mischief has been wrought by the clerical endeavour to set up a necessary association between right conduct and orthodoxy, between heterodoxy and vice. This Mr. Wells knows as well as I do; yet he can use such phrases as "Without God, the 'Service of Man' is no better than a hobby or a sentimentality or a hypocrisy." No doubt he has carefully explained that he does not mean by God or religion what the clergy mean; but can he be sure that by imitating their phrases he may not imperceptibly slide into their frame of mind? or at any rate tempt the weaker brethren to do so? In using such an expression he comes perilously near the attitude adopted by the Bishop of London in a recent address to the sailors of the Grand Fleet. His Lordship told his hearers—we have it on his own authority—that "there was in everyone a good man and a bad man. And I have not known a case," he added, "where the good man conquered the bad man without religion." Can there be any doubt that the Bishop was either telling—well, not the truth—or shamelessly playing with words? Of course it may be said that any man who keeps his lower instincts in control does so by aid of a feeling that there are higher values in life than sensual gratification or direct

self-gratification of any sort; and we may, if we are so minded, call this feeling religion. But it is a very inconvenient meaning to attach to the word, and we cannot take it to be the meaning the Bishop had in view. What he meant, in all probability—what he desired his simple-minded hearers to understand—was that he had never known a good man who did not believe, if not in all the dogmas of the Church of England, at any rate in the Christian Trinity, the fall of man, redemption from sin, and the inspiration of the Scriptures. He meant that no man could be good who did not believe that God has given us in writing a synopsis of his plan of world-government, and has himself sojourned on earth and submitted to an appearance of death, some two thousand years ago, in fulfilment of the said plan. If he did *not* mean that, he was, I repeat, playing with words and deceiving his hearers, who would certainly understand him to mean something to that effect; and if he *did* mean that, he departed very palpably from the truth. The Bishop of London is no recluse, shut up in a monastery among men of his own faith. He is a man of the modern world, and he must know, and know that he knows, scores of men as good as himself who have no be-

lief in anything that he would recognize as religion. Perhaps he was not directly conscious of telling a falsehood, for "faith" plays such havoc with the intellect that men cease to attach any living meaning to words, and come to deal habitually in those unrealized phrases which we call cant. But whatever may have been his excuses to his conscience, he was saying a very noxious thing to the simple, gallant souls who heard him. Many of them must have been well aware that they had no faith that would have satisfied the Bishop of London, and that whatever religious ideas lurked in their minds were of very little use to them in struggling with the temptations of a sailor's life. Where was the sense in telling them that the ordinary motives which make for good conduct—prudence, self-respect, loyalty, etc., etc.—are of no avail, and that they must inevitably be bad men if they had not "found religion"? If such talk does no positive harm, it is only because men have learnt to discount the patter of theology. Yet here we find Mr. Wells, after vigorously disclaiming any participation in the Bishop's beliefs, falling into the common form of episcopal patter, and telling me, for example—a benighted but quite well-intentioned heathen—that I can do no good in my

generation unless I believe in a God whom he and a number of Eastern sages, Parthians, Medes, Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia, have recently "synthetized" out of their inner consciousnesses! It is not Mr. Wells's fault if I do not abandon the steep and thorny track of austerity which I have hitherto pursued, invest all my spare cash either in whiskey or in whiskey shares, and go for my philosophy in future to the inspiring author of *Musings without Method* in "Blackwood."

It is not quite clear why Mr. Wells should accept so large a part of the Christian ethic and yet refuse to identify his Invisible King with Christ. One would have supposed it quite as easy to divest the Christ-figure of any inconvenient attributes as to eliminate omniscience and omnipotence from the God-idea. Mr. Wells constantly allows his thoughts to run into the stereotype moulds of biblical phraseology. We have seen how he talks of "the still small voice," of "the light of the world," "taking the sting from death" and of God coming "in his own time" and bringing "not rest but a sword." To those instances may be added such phrases as "death will be swallowed up in victory" (p. 39), "by the grace of the true God" (p. 44), "God is Love" (p. 65), "the Son of Man"

(p. 86), "I become my brother's keeper" (p. 97), "he it is who can deliver us 'from the body of this death' " (p. 99). But the clearest indication of Christian influence is to be found in Mr. Wells's unhesitating and emphatic adoption of the idea that "Salvation is indeed to lose oneself" (p. 73). "The difference," he says, "between . . . the unbeliever and the servant of the true God is this . . . that the latter has experienced a complete turning away from self. This only difference is all the difference in the world" (p. 84). It is curious what a fascination this turn of phrase has exercised upon many and diverse intelligences. Mr. Bernard Shaw, for instance, adopts it with enthusiasm. Henrik Ibsen—if it is ever possible to tie a true dramatist down to a doctrine—preaches in *Peer Gynt* that "to be thyself is to slay thyself." Mr. Wells has a cloud of witnesses to back him up; and yet it is very doubtful whether the turn of phrase is a really helpful one—whether it does not rather get in the way of the natural man in his quest for a sound rule of life.

It is a commonplace that the entirely self-centred man—the Robinson Crusoe of a desert island of egoism—is unhappy. At least if he is not he belongs to a low intellectual and moral type: the

proof being that all development above the level of the oyster and the slug has involved more or less surrender of the immediate claims of "number one" to some larger unity. Progress has always consisted, and still consists, in the widening of the ideal concept which appeals to our loyalty. Is it not Mr. Wells's endeavour in this very book to claim our devotion for the all-embracing and ultimate ideal—the human race? So far, we are all at one. But when we are told that "conversion" or "salvation" consists in a "*complete* turning away from self," common sense revolts. It is not true either in every-day life or in larger matters of conduct. In every-day life the incurably "unselfish" person is an intolerable nuisance. Here the common-sense rule is very simple: you have no right to seek your own "salvation," or, in non-theological terms, your own self-approval, at the cost of other people's; you have no business to offer sacrifices which the other party ought not to accept. It is true that in the application of this simple rule difficult problems may arise; but a little tact will generally go a long way towards solving them. In these matters an ounce of tact is worth a pound of casuistry. And in our every-day England, in all classes, it is my profound conviction that a reasonable selflessness

is very far from uncommon, very far from being confined to the "converted" of any religion. For forty years I have watched it growing and spreading before my very eyes. Reading the other way *The Roundabout Papers*, I was greatly struck by the antiquated cast of the manners therein described. Of course Thackeray, in his day, was reputed a cynic, and supposed to have an over-partiality for studying the seamy side of things. But even if that had been true (which I do not believe) it would not have accounted for all the difference between the world he saw and that in which we move to-day. I suggest, then, that so far as the minor moralities are concerned, no new religion is required, and we have only to let things pursue their natural trend.

And what of the great selflessnesses? What of the ideal loyalties? What of the long-accumulated instincts which tell a man, in tones which brook no contradiction, that the shortest life and the cruellest death are better than the longest life of sensual self-contempt? Here, as it seems to me, Mr. Wells's apostolate of a new religion is very conspicuously superfluous—much more so than it would have been five years ago. For have not he and I been privileged to witness one of the most

beautiful sights that the world ever saw—the flocking of Young England, in its hundreds upon hundreds of thousands, to endure the extremity of hardship and face the high probability of a cruel death, not for England alone, not even for England, France and Belgium, but for what they obscurely but very potently felt to be the highest interests of the very same ideal entity which Mr. Wells proposes to our devotion—the human race? I am sure he would be the last to minimize the significance of that splendid uprising. No doubt there were other motives at work: in some, the mere love of change and adventure; in others, the pressure of public opinion. But my own observation assures me that, on the whole, these unideal motives played a very small part. The young men simply felt that he who held back was unfaithful to his fathers and unworthy of his sons; and they "turned away from self" without a moment's hesitation, and streamed to the colors with all the more eagerness the longer the casualty-lists grew, and the more clearly the horrors they had to face were brought home to them. Has there been any voluntary "slaying of self" on so huge a scale since the world began? I have not heard of it. And Mr. Wells will scarcely tell me that these young men went

through the experiences he describes as "conversion," and escaped from the burden of "over-individuation" by throwing themselves into the arms of a synthetic God! Many of them, no doubt, would have expressed their idealism, had they expressed it at all, in terms of Christianity; but that, we are told, is a delusion, and the only true God is the Invisible King. If that be so, the conclusion would seem to be that, in the present stage of the evolution of human character, no God at all is needed to enable millions of men, in whom the blood runs high and the joy of life is at its keenest, to achieve the conquest of self in one of its noblest forms. Or (what comes to the same thing) any sort of God will serve the purpose. Your God (divested of metaphysical attributes) is simply a name for your own better instincts and impulses. Many people, perhaps most, share Mr. Wells's tendency to externalize, objectivate, personify these impulses; and there may be no harm in doing so. But when it comes to asserting that your own personification is the only true one, then—I am not so sure.

Finally there arises the question whether the personification of the Invisible King can really, in any comprehensible sense, and for any considerable number of normal human beings, rob death

of its sting, the grave of its victory? On this point discussion cannot possibly be conclusive, for the ultimate test is necessarily a personal one. If any sane and sincere person tells me that a certain idea, or emotion, or habit of mind, or even any rite or incantation, has deprived death of its terrors for him, I can only congratulate him, even if I have to confess that my own experience gives me no clue to his meaning. It is not even very profitable to enquire whether a man can be confident of his own attitude towards death unless he has either come very close to its brink himself, or known what it means to witness the extinction of a life on which his whole joy in the present and hope for the future depended. All one can do is to try to ascertain as nearly as possible what the contemner of death really means, and to consider whether his individual experience or feeling is, or is likely to become, typical.

One thing we must plainly realize, and that is that, for the purposes of his present argument, Mr. Wells conceives death to be a real extinction of the individual consciousness. He does not formally commit himself to a denial of personal immortality, but it is a contingency which he declines to take into account. Oddly enough, in

trying to acclimatize our minds to the idea of such an absolutely incorporeal and immaterial, yet really existent, being as his Invisible King, he comes near to clearing away the one great obstacle to belief in survival after death. "From the earliest ages," he says, "man's mind has found little or no difficulty in the idea of something essential to the personality, a soul or a spirit or both, existing apart from the body and continuing after the destruction of the body, and being still a person and an individual" (p. 59). He does not actually say that there *is* no difficulty about this conception: he only says that, as a matter of history, the great mass of men have found it easy and natural to believe in ghosts. But it is hard to see any force in his argument at this point unless he means to imply that he himself finds "little or no difficulty" in conceiving the continued existence of a spiritual consciousness and individuality after the dissolution of the body to which it has been attached; and if he does mean this, it is hard to see why he does not take his stand beside Sir Oliver Lodge on the spiritist platform. To many of us, the extreme difficulty of such a conception is the one great barrier to the acceptance of the spiritist theory, for which remarkable evidence can

certainly be adduced. This, however, is a digression. So far as *God the Invisible King* is concerned, Mr. Wells must be taken as ignoring, if not rejecting, the idea of personal immortality.

The victory over death, then, which the Invisible King is said to achieve, does not consist in its abolition. It may probably be best defined as the perfect reconcilement of the believer to the extinction of his individual consciousness. And what are the grounds of that reconcilement? Let us search the scriptures. Where the steps are described by which the catechumen approaches the full realization of God, it is said that at that stage he feels that "if there were such a being he would supply the needed consolation and direction, his continuing purpose would knit together the scattered effort of life, *his immortality would take the sting from death*" (p. 21–22). A little further on, the idea is elaborated in a high strain of mysticism. God, who "captains us but does not coddle us" (p. 42), will by no means undertake to hold the believer scatheless among the pitfalls and perils that beset our earthly pilgrimage. "But God will be with you nevertheless. In the reeling aeroplane, or the dark ice-cave, God will be your courage. Though you suffer or are killed, it is not an end.

He will be with you as you face death; he will die with you as he has died already countless myriads of brave deaths. He will come so close to you that at the last you will not know whether it is you or he who dies, and the present death will be swallowed up in his victory" (p. 39). The passage has already been quoted in which it is written that, at the end of the fight for God's Kingdom, "we are altogether taken up into his being" (p. 68). In a discussion of "the religion of atheists" we are told that unregenerate man is "acutely aware of himself as an individual and unawakened to himself as a species," wherefore he "finds death frustration." His mistake is in not seeing that his own frustration "may be the success and triumph of his kind" (p. 72). At the point where we are told that "the first purpose of God is the attainment of clear knowledge," we are further informed that "he will apprehend more fully as time goes on" the purpose to which this knowledge is to be applied. But already it is possible to define "the broad outlines" of his purpose. "It is the conquest of death; first the overcoming of death in the individual *by the incorporation of the motives of his life into an undying purpose*" (p. 99), and then, as we saw before, the defeat of the threat-

ened extinction of life through the cooling of the planet. These, I think, are the chief texts bearing directly on this particular matter; but there is one other remark which must not be overlooked. "A convicted criminal, frankly penitent," we are told, ". . . may still die well and bravely on the gallows, to the glory of God. He may step straight from that death into the immortal being of God."

To what, now, does all this amount? Is there any more substantial solace in it than in the "Oh, may I join the Choir Invisible" aspiration of mid-nineteenth-century positivism? Far be it from me to speak contemptuously of that aspiration. It gives a new orientation and consistency to thought and effort during life; and to the man who feels that his little note will melt into the world-harmony that is to be, that thought may impart a certain serenity under the shadow of the end. It is certainly better to feel at night, "I have done a fair day's work," than to lie down with the confession, "My day has been wasted, and worse." No one wants, I suppose, to say with Peer Gynt:—

> Thou beautiful earth, be not angry with me,
> That I trampled thy grasses to no avail;
> Thou beautiful sun, thou hast squandered away

Thy glory of light in an empty hut.
Beautiful sun and beautiful earth,
You were foolish to bear and give light to my mother.

But there is also another side to the question. The more surely you believe that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs"—the more intimately you have merged your individual will in what Mr. Wells would call the will of the Invisible King—the less do you relish the thought that you can never see that will worked out. The intenser your interest in the play, the greater your disinclination to leave the theatre just as the plot is thickening. Nor does it afford much consolation to know that the Producer is just (as it were) getting into his stride, and that, if the house should become too cold for comfort, arrangements will be made for the transference of the production to another theatre, with a better heating-apparatus.

Is there any real escape from the fact that for each of us the one thing that actually exists is our individual consciousness? It is our universe; and if its trembling flame is blown out, that particular universe is no more. If its limits of "individuation" are irrecoverably lost, what avails it to tell us that the flame is absorbed into the light of the

world or the dayspring on high? Is it possible to imagine that the rain-drop which falls in the Atlantic thrills with a great rapture as its molecules disperse in the moment of coalescence, because it is now part of an infinite and immortal entity? Yes, it is possible to imagine it rejoicing that its "chagrins of egotism," as an individual drop, are now over; in fact, this is precisely the sort of thing that some poets love to imagine; but has it any real relevance to our sublunary lot? Can it minister any substantial comfort or fortification to the normal man in the moment of peril or agony? I ask; I do not answer. Can Mr. Wells put in the witness-box any flight-lieutenant who will swear that in his reeling aeroplane, as death seemed on the point of engulfing him, he felt uncertain whether it was God or he that was about to die, and gloriously certain that in any case he was about to "step straight into the immortal being of God"? And even if, in the excitement of violent action, such hallucinations do mean something to a peculiar type of mind, has any one dying of pneumonia or Bright's disease been known to declare that, though his mortal spark was on the point of extinction, he felt that "by the incorporation of the motives of his life into an undying

purpose" he had triumphed over death and the grave? The simple soul who says "We shall meet in Heaven" no doubt enjoys such a triumph—and even if he fails to keep the appointment, no one is any the worse. But where are the men and women who feel the immortality of God, however we define or construct him, a rich compensation for their own mortality?

It may be said that I am applying shockingly terrestrial tests to Mr. Wells's soaring transcendentalisms. I am simply asking: "Will they work?" A world-religion cannot be what I have called a luxury for the intellectually wealthy. It must be within the reach of plain men and women; and plain men and women cannot, as the French say, "pay themselves with words." Take them all round, they do not make too much of death. With or without the aid of religion, they generally meet it with tolerable fortitude. But it will be hard to persuade them that annihilation is a thing to be faced with rapture, because a synthetic God is indestructible; or that death is not death because other people will be alive a hundred or a thousand years hence. Even if you cannot offer them another life, you may tell them of the grave as a place where the wicked cease from troubling and

the weary are at rest, and they will understand. But will they understand if you tell them that we triumph over the grave because God dies with us and yet never dies? I fear it will need something clearer and more credible than this to make the undertaker a popular functionary.

The doctrines of "the modern religion" may give us a new motive for living; but how can they at the same time diminish our distaste for dying? That might be their effect, no doubt, in cases where we felt that our death was promoting some great and sacred cause more than our life could have done; but such cases must always be extremely rare. Even the soldier on the battlefield will help his country more by living than by dying, if he can do so without failing in his duty. His death is not a triumph, but only a lesser evil than cowardice and disgrace. And what shall we say, for example, of the case of a young biologist who dies of blood-poisoning on the eve of a great and beneficent discovery? Is not this a case in which the modern God might with advantage have swerved from his principles and (for once) played the part of Providence? It is better, no doubt, to die in a good cause than to throw away life

in the pursuit of folly or vice; but is it not playing with words to say that even the end of a martyr to science like Captain Scott, or a martyr to humanity like Edith Cavell, is a triumph over death and the grave? It is a triumph over cowardice, baseness, the love of ease and safety, all the paltrier aspects of our nature; but a triumph over death it is not. If it be true (which I do not believe) that German soldiers sign a declaration devoting the glycerine in their dead bodies to their country's service, one may imagine that some of them feel a species of satisfaction in resolving upon this final proof of patriotism; but it will be a gloomy satisfaction at best; there will be a lack of exhilaration about it; if the Herr Hauptmann who witnesses their signatures congratulates them on having triumphed over death, they will be apt to think it a rather empty form of words. If they had had the advantage of reading Jane Austen, they would probably say with Mr. Bennet, "Let us take a more cheerful view of the subject, and suppose that I survive."

I fear that not even the companionship offered by the modern God in the act of dissolution will make death a cheerful experience, or induce

ordinary, unaffected mortals to glory in their mortality. It is too much the habit of Gods to pretend to die when they don't really die at all—when, in fact, the whole idea is a mere intellectual hocus-pocus.

VII

BACK TO THE VEILED BEING

WHY has Mr. Wells partly goaded and partly hypnotized himself into the belief that he is the predestined prolocutor of a new hocus-pocus? Rightly or wrongly, I diagnose his case thus: What he really cares for is the future of humanity, or, in more concrete language, social betterment. He suffers more than most of us from the spectacle of the world of today, because he has the constructive imagination which can place alongside of that chaos of cupidities and stupidities a vision of a rational world-order which seems easily attainable if only some malignant spell could be lifted from the spirit of man. But he finds himself impotent in face of the crass inertia of things-as-they-are. Except the gift of oratory, he has all possible advantages for the part of a social regenerator. He has the pen of a ready and sometimes very impressive writer; he has a fair training in science; he has a fertile

and inventive brain; his works of fiction have won for him a great public, both in Europe and America; yet he feels that his social philosophy, his ardent and enlightened meliorism, makes no more impression than the buzzing of a gnat in the ear of a drowsy mastodon. At the same time he has persuaded himself, whether on internal or on external evidence—partly, I daresay, on both—that men cannot thrive, either as individuals or as world-citizens, without some relation of reverence and affection to something outside and above themselves. He foresees that Christianity will come bankrupt out of the War, and yet that the huge, shattering experience will throw the minds of men open to spiritual influences. At the same time (of this one could point to several incidental evidences) he has come a good deal in contact with Indian religiosity, and learnt to know a type of mind to which God, in one form or another, is indeed an essential of life, while the particular form is a matter of comparative indifference. Then the idea strikes him: "Have we not here a great opportunity for placing the motive-power of spiritual fervor behind, or within, the sluggish framework of social idealism? Here it lies, well thought-out, carefully constructed, but inert, like an aeroplane without an

engine. By giving the glow of supernaturalism, of the worship of a personal God, to the good old Religion of Humanity, may we not impart to our schemes for a well-ordered world precisely the uplift they at present lack? It was all very well for chilly New England transcendentalism to 'hitch its waggon to a star,' but the result is that Boston is governed by a Roman Catholic Archbishop. It is really much easier and more effective to hitch our waggon to God, who, being a synthesis of our own higher selves, will naturally pull it in whatever direction we want. Thus the mass of mankind will escape from that spiritual loneliness which is so discomfortable to them, and will find, in one and the same personification, a deity to listen to their prayers, and a 'boss,' in the Tammany sense of the term, to herd them to the polling-booths. What we want is collectivism touched with emotion. By proclaiming it to be the will of God, and identifying sound politics with ecstatic piety, we may shorten by several centuries the path to a new world-order."

This is a translation into plain English of the thoughts which would seem to have possessed Mr. Wells's mind during the past year or so. I do not for a moment mean that he put them to himself

in plain English. That would be to accuse him of insincerity—a thought which I most sincerely disclaim. I have not the least doubt that the Invisible King does actually supply a "felt want" in his spiritual outfit, and that he is perfectly convinced that most other people are similarly constituted and will welcome this new object of loyalty and devotion. Time will show whether his psychology is correct. If it is, then he has indeed made an important discovery. To use a very homely illustration: a carrot dangled from the end of a stick before a donkey's nose makes no mechanical difference in the problem of traction presented by the costermonger's barrow. If anything, it adds to the weight to be drawn. But if the sight of it cheers, heartens, and inspires the donkey, helping him to overcome those fits of lethargy so characteristic of his race, then the carrot may quite appreciably accelerate the general rate of progress. It all depends on the psychology of the donkey.

Moses doubtless did very wisely in going up into Mount Sinai and abiding there forty days and forty nights. Whatever he may have seen and heard, the semblance of communion with a Higher Power unquestionably lent a prestige to his scheme

of social reform which it could never have attained had he offered it on its inherent merits, as the project of a mere human legislator, or (still worse) of a man of letters. Moses, in fact, knew his Children of Israel. Does Mr. Wells know his modern Englishmen or Anglo-Americans?

That is the question.

Mr. Bernard Shaw has made a similar and very ingenious attempt, not exactly to found a new religion, but to place his ideas in a religious atmosphere. In the preface to *Androcles and the Lion* (a disquisition just about as long as *God the Invisible King*) he propounds the question, "Why not give Christianity a trial?" and opens the discussion thus: "The question seems a hopeless one after 2,000 years of resolute adherence to the old cry of 'Not this man, but Barabbas.' Yet it is beginning to look as if Barabbas was a failure, in spite of his strong right hand, his victories, his empires, his millions of money, and his moralities and churches and political constitutions. 'This man' has not been a failure yet; for nobody has ever been sane enough to try his way." Then he goes on to shew, by a course of very plausible reasoning, that the teaching of Jesus was, in all essentials, an exact anticipation of the economic

and social philosophy of G. B. S.; so that, in giving political expression to that philosophy, we should be, for the first time, establishing the Kingdom of Christ upon earth. It is true that there are passages in the Gospels which no more accord with Mr. Shaw's sociology than do omnipotence and omniscience with the theology of Mr. Wells. But these passages do not embarrass Mr. Shaw. He simply points out that, at Matthew xvi, 16, where Peter hailed him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus went mad. Up to that fatal moment "his history is that of a man sane and interesting apart from his special gifts as orator, healer and prophet"; but from that point onward he set to work to live up to "his destiny as a god," part of which was to be killed and to rise again. Many other prophets have gone mad—for instance, Ruskin and Nietzsche. Therefore we can have no difficulty in simply eliminating as a morbid aberration whatever is un-Shavian in the message of Jesus, and accepting the rest as the sincere milk of the word. Mr. Shaw's attempt to place his philosophy under divine patronage is not so serious as Mr. Wells's; for Mr. Shaw can never take himself quite seriously for five pages together. But the motive, in each case, in mani-

festly the same—to obtain for a system of ideas the prestige, the power of insinuation, penetration, and stimulation, that attaches to the very name of religion.

The notion is a very tempting one. What every prophet wants, in the babel of latter-day thought, is a magic sounding-board which shall make his voice carry to the ends of the earth and penetrate to the dullest understanding. The more he believes in his own reason, the more he yearns for some method of out-shouting the unreason of his neighbours. German philosophy thought it had discovered the ideal reverberator in the artillery of Herr Krupp von Bohlen; but the world is curiously indisposed to conversion by cannon, and has retorted in a still louder roar of high-explosive arguments. God, as a politico-philosophical ally, is certainly cheaper than Herr Krupp; and, divested of his mediæval sword and tinder-box, he is decidedly humaner. But is the glamour of his name quite what it once was? Or can it be restored to its pristine potency?

On a question, such as this, on which the evidence is too vague, too voluminous and too complex to be interpreted with any certainty, our wishes are apt to take control of our thoughts.

Making all allowance for this source of error, I nevertheless venture to suggest to Mr. Wells that we may perhaps be passing out of, not into, an age of religiosity. May it not be that the time has come to give the name of God a rest? Is it not possible, and even probable, that, while the vast apocalypse of the observatory and the laboratory is proceeding with unexampled speed, thinking people may prefer to await its developments, rather than pin their faith to an interim, synthetic God, whom his own still, small voice must, in moments of candor, confess to be merely make-believe? Is it the fact that men, or even women, of our race are, as a rule, absolutely dependent for courage, energy, self-control and self-devotion, upon some "great brother" outside themselves, "a strongly-marked personality, loving, inspiring and lovable," whom they conceive to be always within call? In making this assumption, is not Mr. Wells ignoring the great mass of paganism in the world around him—not all of it, or even most of it, self-conscious and self-confessed, but none the less real on that account? He makes a curious remark as to the personage whom he calls "the benevolent atheist," which is, I take it, his

nickname for the man who is not much interested in midway Gods between himself and the Veiled Being. This hapless fellow-creature, says Mr. Wells, "has not really given himself or got away from himself. He has no one to whom he can give himself. *He is still a masterless man*" (p. 83). As Mr. Wells has evidently read a good deal about Japan, he no doubt takes this expression from Japanese feudalism, which made a distinct class of the "ronin" or masterless man, who had, by death or otherwise, lost his feudal superior. But is it really, to our Western sense, a misfortune to be a masterless man? Does the healthy human spirit suffer from having no one to bow down to, no one to relieve it of the burden of choice, responsibility, self-control? If our feudal allegiance has terminated through the death of the Gods who asserted a hereditary claim upon it, must we make haste to build ourselves an idol, or synthetize a mosaic ikon, to serve as the recipient of our obeisances, genuflexions, osculations? I cannot believe that this is a general, and much less a universal, tendency. If any one is irked by the condition of a "masterless man," the Roman Catholic Church holds wide its doors for him. It seems very

doubtful whether any less ancient, dogmatic, hieratic, spectacular form of make-believe will serve his turn.

It has sometimes seemed to me that the one great advantage of Western Christianity lies in the fact that nobody very seriously believes in it. "Nobody" is not a mathematically accurate expression, but it is quite in the line of the truth. You have to go to Asia to find out what religion means. If you cannot get so far, Russia will serve as a half-way house; but to study religion on its native heath, so to speak, you must go to India. Of course there may be some illusion in the matter, due to one's ignorance of the languages and inability to estimate the exact spiritual significance of outward manifestations; but I cannot believe that, anywhere between Suez and Singapore, there exists that healthy godlessness, that lack of any real effective dependence on any outward Power "dal tetto in su," which is so common in and around all Christian churches. In China and Japan it is another matter. There, I fancy, religious "ronins" are common enough. But in the lands of the Crescent and the land of "OM," anything like freedom of the human spirit is probably very rare and very difficult. The difference

does not arise from any lesser stringency in the claims of Christianity to spiritual dominion, but rather, I imagine, from a deep-seated divergence in racial heredity. We Western Aryans have behind us the serene and splendid rationalisms of Greece and Rome. We are accustomed from childhood to the knowledge that our civilization was founded by two mighty aristocracies of intellect, to whom the religions of their day were, as they are to us, nothing but more or less graceful fairy-tales.[1] We know that many of the greatest men the world ever saw, while phrasing their relation to the "deus absconditus" in various ways, were utterly free from that penitential, supplicatory abjectness which is the mark of Asian salvationism. And though of course the conscious filiation to Greece and Rome is rare, the habit of mind which holds up its head in the world and feels no childish craving to cling to the skirts of a God, is not rare at all. Therefore I conceive that people who are shaken out of their conventional, unrealized Christianity by the earthquake of the war will not, as a rule, be in any hurry to rush into

[1] Namque deos didici securum agere aevum,
nec, siquid miri faciat natura, deos id
tristes ex alto caeli demittere tecto.

HORACE, *Satires* I., 5.

the arms of the "great brother" constructed for them by Mr. Wells. It is easier to picture them flocking to the banner of the Fabian Jesus—the Christ uncrucified, and restored to sanity, of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

Does it really seem to Mr. Wells an arid and damnable "atheism" that finds in the very mystery of existence a subject of contemplation so inexhaustibly marvellous as to give life the fascination of a detective story? When Mr. Wells tells us that "the first purpose of God is the attainment of clear knowledge, of knowledge as a means to more knowledge, and of knowledge as a means to power," he states what is, to many of us, the first and last article of religion—only that we prefer to steer clear of hocus-pocus and substitute "Man" for "God." If we are almost, or even quite, reconciled to the cruelties and humiliations of life by the thought of its visual glories, its intellectual triumphs, and the mysteries with which it is surrounded, is that frame of mind wholly unworthy to be called religious? If it is, I, for one, shall not complain; for religion, like God, is a word that has been—

Defamed by every charlatan
And soil'd with all ignoble use.

But it will be difficult to persuade me of the loftier spirituality, or even the more abiding solace, involved in ecstatic devotion to a figure of speech.

There are two elements of consolation in life: the things of which we are sure, and the things of which we are unsure. We are sure that man has somehow been launched upon the most romantic adventure that mind can conceive. He has set forth to conquer and subdue the world, including the stupidities and basenesses of his own nature. At first his progress was incalculably slow; then he came on with a rush in the great sub-tropical river basins; and presently, where the brine of the Ægean got into his blood, he achieved such miracles of thought and art that his subsequent history, for well-nigh two thousand years, bore the appearance of retrogression. I have already asked what the Invisible King was about when he suffered the glory that was Athens to sink in the fog-bank that was Alexandria. At all events, that wonderful false-start came to nothing. Rome succeeded to the world-leadership; and Rome, though energetic and capable, was never

brilliant. With her, European free thought, investigation, science flickered out, and Asian religion took its place. Truly the slip-back from antiquity to the dark ages offers a specious argument to the atheists—the true and irredeemable atheists—who deny the reality of progress. Specious, but quite insubstantial; for we can analyze the terrestrial conditions which led to that catastrophe, and assure ourselves that the bugbear of their recurrence is nothing more than a bugbear. The printing-press alone is an inestimable safeguard. If the Greeks had hit upon the idea of movable types—and it is little to the credit of the Invisible King that they did not—the onrush of barbarism and Byzantinism would not have been half so disastrous. And even through the Dark Ages the bias towards betterment is still perceptible, though its operation was terribly hampered. Then, at last, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took up the thread of progress where antiquity had dropped it. Science revived, and bade defiance to dogma. The garnering of knowledge began afresh; and true knowledge has this to distinguish it from pseudo-sciences like astrology, theology, and philately, that it is instinct with procreative vigour. Knowledge breeds

knowledge with ever-increasing rapidity; and the result is that the past hundred years have seen additions to man's control over the powers of nature which outstrip the wildest imaginings of Eastern romance. When Mr. Gladstone first went to Rome in 1832, his "transportation" was no swifter and scarcely more comfortable than that of Cæsar in the fifties before Christ. Today he could fly over the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa, and then cover the distance from Milan onwards at the rate of seventy miles an hour in a limousine as luxurious as an Empress's boudoir. We are piling up the knowledge which is power at an enormous rate—indeed rather too rapidly, since we have not yet the sense to discriminate between power for good and power for evil. But "burnt bairns dread the fire," and after the present awful experience, there is fair ground for hope that measures will be taken to provide strait-waistcoats for the criminal lunatics whose vanity and greed impel them to let loose the powers of destruction.

Can any thinking man say that the world is quite the same to him since the invention of wireless telegraphy? True it is only one among the multitude of phenomena behind which the Veiled Being dissembles himself. But is it not a phenomenon

of a new and perhaps an epoch-marking order? It may not make the veil more diaphanous, but it somehow suggests an alteration—perhaps a progressive alteration—in its texture.

When we say we are sure of the fact of progress, the atheist comes down on us with the retort that we thereby confess ourselves naïve and credulous optimists. As well say that when we express our confidence that the North Western Railway will carry us to Manchester, we thereby imply the belief that Manchester is the Earthly Paradise. It is quite possible—any one who is so minded may say it is quite probable—that progress means advance towards disillusion. What we are sure of is merely this: that life may be, and ought to be, a very different thing from what it now is, and that it is in our own power to make it so. We have not the least doubt that the generations which come after us will say:—

> We will not cease from mortal strife,
> Nor shall the sword slip from our hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land.

But whether, when they have built it, they will think Jerusalem worth the building is quite a different matter. It may be that Leopardi was

right when he said, "Men are miserable by necessity, but resolute in believing themselves to be miserable by accident." That is a proposition which the individual can accept or reject so far as his own little span is concerned, but on which the race, as such, can pass no valid judgment. Life has never had a fair chance. It has always been so beset with accidental and corrigible evils that no man can say what life, in its ultimate essence, really is. All we know is that many of its miseries are factitious, inessential, eminently curable; and till these are eradicated, how are we to determine whether there are other evils too deep-rooted for our surgery? It may be, for example, that the elimination of Pain would only leave a vacuum for Tedium to rush in; but how are we to decide this *à priori?* Let us learn what are the true potentialities of life before we undertake to declare whether it is worth living or not.

Perhaps I may be allowed to quote at this point some words of my own which express the idea I am trying to convey as clearly as I am capable of putting it. They are part of the last paragraph of an address entitled *Knowledge and Character: The Straight Road in Education:* [1]

[1] London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916.

The great, dominant, all-controlling fact of this life is the innate bias of the human spirit, not towards evil, as the theologians tell us, but towards good. But for this bias, man would never have been man; he would only have been one more species of wild animal ranging a savage, uncultivated globe, the reeking battle-ground of sheer instinct and appetite. But somehow and somewhere there germinated in his mind the idea that association, co-operation, would serve his ends better than unbridled egoism in the struggle for existence. Instead of "each man for himself" his motto became "each man for his family, or his tribe, or his nation, or—ultimately—for humankind." And, at a very early stage, what made for association, co-operation, brotherhood, came to be designated "good," while that which sinned against these upward tendencies was stigmatized as "evil." From that moment the battle was won, and the transfiguration of human life became only a matter of time. The prejudice in favour of the idea of good is the fundamental fact of our moral nature. It has an irresistible, a magical prestige. We have made, and are still making, a myriad mistakes—tragic and horrible mistakes—in striving for good things which are evils in disguise. A few of us (though relatively not very many) try to overcome the prejudice altogether, and say, "Evil, be thou my good!" But even these recreants and deserters from the great army of humanity have to express themselves in terms of good, and to take their stand on a sheer contradiction. Evil, as such, has simply not a fighting chance. The prestige of good is stupendous. We are all hypnotized by it; and the reason we are slow in realizing the ideal is, not that we are evil, but that we are stupid.

"Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens"—no one had a better right to say that than a German poet. But though the Invisible King has made a poor fight against human stupidity, it is not really unconquerable. If Gods

cannot conquer it, men can. Its strongholds are falling one by one, and, though a long fight is before us, its end is not in doubt.

We may even hope, not without some plausibility, that moral progress may be all the more rapid in the future because the limit of what may be called mechanical progress cannot be so very far off. The conquest of distance is the great material fact that makes for world-organization; and distance cannot, after all, be more than annhilated —it cannot be reduced to a minus quantity. Now that we can whisper round the globe as we whisper round the dome of St. Paul's, we cannot get much further on that line of advance, until immaterial thought-transference shall enable us "to flash through one another in a moment as we will." We may before long have reduced the crossing of the Atlantic from five days to one, or even less; but in that direction, too, there is a limit to progress; no invention will enable us to arrive before we start. The conquest of physical disease seems to be well within view; the possibilities of intensive cultivation and selective breeding in plants and animals are likely to be rapidly developed. When such material problems cease to exercise the first fascination upon the enquiring mind, the mental

sciences, psychology and sociology, with the great neglected art of education, may come into their kingdom. Then the atheism which avers that the world stands still, or moves only in a circle, will no longer be possible. Then all reasonable men will feel themselves soldiers in "a mighty army which has won splendid victories (though here and there chequered with defeats) on its march out of the dim and tragic past, and is clearly destined to far greater triumphs in the future, if only each man does, with unflinching loyalty, the duty assigned to him." That loyalty will then be the conscious and acknowledged rule of life, as it is now in an instinctive and half-realized fashion. It will help us, more than all the personifications in the world, to "turn away from self." It will not take the sting from death, but it will enable us to feel that we have earned our rest, and brought no disgrace upon the colors of our regiment.

Is it necessary to protest once more that this assurance of progress towards the good is not to be confounded with optimism? For it is clear that "good" is a question-begging word. The only possible definition of "good" is "that which makes for life"—for life, not only measured by quantity, but by quality and intensity—"that ye

may have life more abundantly." Why is egoism evil? Because a world in which it reigned supreme would very soon come to an end, or at any rate could not support anything like the abundance of life which is rendered possible by mutual aid and co-operation. Why are order, justice, courage, humanity good? Because they enable more people to lead fuller lives than would be possible in the absence of such guiding principles. But in all this we assume the validity of the standard—"life" —which is precisely what pessimism denies. And pessimism may quite conceivably be in the right on't. It is quite conceivable that, having made the best that can possibly be made of life, a world-weary race might decide that the best was not good enough, and deliberately turn away from it. But that is a contingency, a speculation, which no sane man would allow to affect his action here and now, or to impair his loyalty to his comrades in the great terrestrial adventure.

And is not this question of the ultimate value of life precisely one of the uncertainties which lend —if the flippancy may be excused—a "sporting interest" to our position? I have said that we have two elements of consolation: the things which are sure and the things which are unsure: in other

words, the axioms and the mysteries. Reason is all very well so far as it goes, and we do right to trust to it; but it may prove, after all, that the things that are behind and beyond and above reason are the things that really matter. Does this seem a concession to obscurantism? Not at all—for the things obscurantism glories in are things beneath reason, which is quite another affair. At the same time, we are too apt to think that reason has drawn a complete outline-map of its "sphere of influence," in which there are many details to be filled in, but no boundaries to be shifted, no regions wholly unexplored. It is, for instance, very unreasonable to hold that we can draw a hard and fast line between the materially possible and impossible. There is certainly a curious ragged edge to our purely scientific knowledge, and it may well be that in following up the frayed-out threads we may come upon things very surprising and important. For example, the question whether consciousness can exist detached from organized matter, or attached to some form of matter of which we have no knowledge, I regard as purely a question of evidence; and I not only admit but assert that the evidence pointing in that direction is worthy of careful examination. The

interpretation which sees in it a proof of personal immortality may be wrong, but that does not prove that the right interpretation is not worth discovering. The spiritist voyagers may not have reached the Indies of their hopes, yet may have stumbled upon an unsuspected America. Nor does the fact that they are eager and credulous invalidate the whole, or anything like the whole, of their evidence.

After all, is it a greater miracle that consciousness should exist *de*tached from matter than that it should exist *at*tached to matter? Yet the latter miracle nobody doubts, except in the nursery games of the metaphysicians.

To define, or rather to adumbrate, the realm of mystery, which is yet as indisputably real as the realm of reason and sense, we naturally turn to the poets, the seers. Here is a glimpse of it through the eyes of Francis Thompson, that creature of transcendent vision who made a strange pretence of wearing the blinkers of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus he writes in his "Anthem of Earth":—

> Ay, Mother! Mother!
> What is this Man, thy darling kissed and cuffed,
> Thou lustingly engender'st,
> To sweat, and make his brag, and rot,

Crowned with all honour and all shamefulness?
From nightly towers
He dogs the secret footsteps of the heavens,
Sifts in his hands the stars, weighs them as gold-dust,
And yet is he successive unto nothing
But patrimony of a little mould,
And entail of four planks. Thou hast made his mouth
Avid of all dominion and all mightiness,
All sorrow, all delight, all topless grandeurs,
All beauty and all starry majesties,
And dim transtellar things;—even that it may,
Filled in the ending with a puff of dust,
Confess—"It is enough." The world left empty
What that poor mouthful crams. His heart is builded
For pride, for potency, infinity,
All heights, all deeps, and all immensities,
Arras'd with purple like the house of kings,—
To stall the grey rat, and the carrion-worm
Statelily lodge. Mother of mysteries!
Sayer of dark sayings in a thousand tongues,
Who bringest forth no saying yet so dark
As we ourselves, thy darkest!

Surely this is the very truth. Man is a hieroglyph to which reason supplies no key—nay, reason itself is the heart of the enigma. And does not this lend a strange fascination to the adventure of life?

Another singer, in a very much simpler strain, puts something of the same idea:—

Marooned on an isle of mystery,
From a stupor of sleep we woke,
And gazed at each other wistfully,
A wondering, wildered folk.

There were flowery valleys and mountains blue,
And pastures, and herds galore,
And fruits that were luscious to bite into,
Though bitter at the core.

So we plucked up heart, and we dree'd our weird
Through flickering gleam and gloom,
And still for rescue we hoped—or feared—
From our island home and tomb.

But never over the sailless sea
Came messenger bark or schooner
With news from the far-off realm whence we
Set sail for that isle of mystery,
Or a whisper of apology
From our mute, malign marooner.

The strain of pessimism in this is even more marked than in Thompson's "Anthem"; and indeed it is hard to deny that the resolute silence of the "Veiled Being," the "Invisible King," and all the Gods and godlings ever propounded to mortal piety, is one of their most suspicious characteristics. Yet it may be that this reproach, however natural, does the Veiled Being—or the Younger Power of our alternative myth—a measure of injustice. It may be that the great Dramaturge keeps his plot to himself precisely in order that the interest may be maintained up to the fall of the curtain. It may be that its disclosure would upset the conditions of some vast experiment which he

is working out. Where would be the interest of a race if its result were a foregone conclusion? Where the passion of a battle if its issue were foreknown? What if we should prove to be somnambulists treading some dizzy edge between two abysses, and able to reach the goal only on condition that we are unconscious of the process? Perhaps the sanest view of the problem is that presented in Bliss Carman's haunting poem

THE JUGGLER

Look how he throws them up and up,
The beautiful golden balls!
They hang aloft in the purple air,
And there never is one that falls.

He sends them hot from his steady hand,
He teaches them all their curves;
And whether the reach be little or long,
There never is one that swerves.

Some, like the tiny red one there,
He never lets go far;
And some he has sent to the roof of the tent
To swim without a jar.

So white and still they seem to hang,
You wonder if he forgot
To reckon the time of their return
And measure their golden lot.

Can it be that, hurried or tirèd out,
The hand of the juggler shook?

O never you fear, his eye is clear,
He knows them all like a book.

And they will home to his hand at last,
For he pulls them by a cord
Finer than silk and strong as fate,
That is just the bid of his word.

Was ever there such a sight in the world?
Like a wonderful winding skein,—
The way he tangles them up together
And ravels them out again!

. . . . . .

If I could have him at the inn
All by myself some night,—
Inquire his country, and where in the world
He came by that cunning sleight!

Where do you guess he learned the trick
To hold us gaping here,
Till our minds in the spell of his maze almost
Have forgotten the time of year?

One never could have the least idea.
Yet why he disposed to twit
A fellow who does such wonderful things
With the merest lack of wit?

Likely enough, when the show is done
And the balls all back in his hand,
He'll tell us why he is smiling so,
And we shall understand.

I am not, perhaps, very firmly assured of this consummation. Yet I am much more hopeful

of one day understanding the Juggler and the Balls than of ever getting into confidential relations with Mr. Wells's Invisible King.

One is conscious of a sort of churlishness in thus rejecting the advances of so amiable a character as the Invisible King. But is Mr. Wells, on his side, quite courteous, or even quite fair, to the Veiled Being? "Riddle me no riddles!" he seems to say; "I am tired of your guessing games. Let us have done with 'distressful enquiry into ultimate origins,' and 'bring our minds to the conception of a spontaneous and developing God' —one of whose existence and benevolence we are sure, since we made him ourselves. I want something to worship, to take me out of myself, to inspire me with brave phrases about death. How can one worship an insoluble problem? Will an enigma die with me in a reeling aeroplane? While you lurk obstinately behind that veil, how can I even know that your political views are sound? Whereas the Invisible King gives forth oracles of the highest political wisdom, in a voice which I can scarcely distinguish from my own. You are a remote, tantalizing entity with nothing comfort-

ing or stimulating about you. But as for my Invisible King, 'Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.' "

A little way back, I compared Mr. Wells to Moses; but, looked at from another point of view, he and his co-religionists may rather be likened to the Children of Israel. Tired of waiting for news from the God on the cloudy mountain-top, did they not make themselves a synthetic deity, finite, friendly, and very like the Invisible King, inasmuch as he seems to have worked no miracles, and done, in fact, nothing whatever? But the God on the mountain-top was wroth, and accused them of idolatry, surely not without reason. For what is idolatry if it be not manufacturing a God, whether out of golden earrings or out of humanitarian sentiments, and then bowing down and worshipping it?

The wrath of the tribal God against his bovine rival was certainly excessive—yet we cannot regard idolatry as one of the loftier manifestations of the religious spirit. The man who can bow down and worship the work of his hands shows a morbid craving for self-abasement. It is possible, no doubt, to plead that the graven image is a mere symbol of incorporeal, supersensible deity; and the

plea is a good one, if, and in so far as, we can believe that the distinction between the sign and the thing signified is clear to the mind of the devotee. The difficulty lies in believing that the type of mind which is capable of focussing its devotion upon a statuette is also capable of distinguishing between the idea of a symbol and the idea of a portrait. But when we pass from the work of a man's hands to the work of his brain —from an actual piece of sculpture to a mental construction—the plea of symbolism can no longer be advanced. This graven image of the mind, so to speak, is the veritable God, or it is nothing; and Mr. Wells, as we have seen, is profuse in his assurances that it is the veritable God. That is what makes his whole attitude and argument so baffling. One can understand an idolater who says "I believe that my God inhabits yonder image," or "Yonder image is only a convenient point of concentration for the reverence, gratitude, and love which pass through it to the august and transcendent Spirit whom it symbolizes." But how are we to understand the idolater who adores, and claims actual divinity for, an emanation from his own brain and the brains of a certain number of like-minded persons? Is it not as though a ven-

triloquist were to prostrate himself before his own puppet?

This craving for something to worship points to an almost uncanny recrudescence of the spirit of Asia in a fine European intelligence. For my own part, as above stated, I cannot believe Mr. Wells's case to be typical; but in that I may be mistaken. It is possible that an epidemic of Asiatic religiosity may be one of the sequels of the War. If that be so—if there are many people who shrink from the condition of the spiritual "ronin," and are in search of a respectable "daimio" to whom to pay their devotion—I beg leave strongly to urge the claims of the Veiled Being as against the Invisible King.

He has at the outset the not inconsiderable advantage of being an entity instead of a non-entity. Whoever or whatever he may be, we are compelled by the very constitution of our minds to assume his (or its) existence; whereas there is manifestly no compulsion to assume the existence of the Invisible King.

Then, again, the Veiled Being is entirely unpretentious. There is no bluster and no cant about him. He does not claim our gratitude for the doubtful boon of life. He does not pretend to be just, while he is committing, or winking at, the

most intolerable injustices. He does not set up to be long-suffering, while in fact he is childishly touchy. He does not profess to be merciful, while the incurable ward, the battlefield—nay, even the maternity home and the dentist's parlor—are there to give him the lie. (Here, of course, I am not contrasting him with the Invisible King, but with more ancient and still more Asian divinities.) It is the moral pretensions tagged on by the theologians to metaphysical Godhead that revolt and estrange reasonable men—Mr. Wells among the rest. If you tell us that behind the Veil we shall find a good-natured, indulgent old man, who chastens us only for our good, is pleased by our flatteries (with or without music), and is not more than suitably vexed at our naughtinesses in the Garden of Eden and elsewhere—we reply that this is a nursery tale which has been riddled, time out of mind, not by wicked sceptics, but by the spontaneous, irrepressible criticism of babes and sucklings. But if you divest the Veiled Being of all ethical—or in other words of all human—attributes, then there is no difficulty whatever in admiring, and even adoring, the marvels he has wrought. Tennyson went deeper than he realized into the nature of things when he wrote—

"For merit lives from man to man,
But not from man, O Lord, to thee."

Once put aside all question of merit and demerit, of praise and blame, and more especially (but this will shock Mr. Wells) of salvation and damnation —and nothing can be easier than to pay to the works of the Veiled Being the meed of an illimitable wonder. When we think of the roaring vortices of flame that spangle the heavens night by night, at distances that beggar conception: when we think of our tiny earth, wrapped in its little film of atmosphere, spinning safely for ages untold amid all these appalling immensities: and when we think, on the other hand, of the battles of claw and maw going on, beneath the starry vault, in that most miraculous of jewels, a drop of water: we cannot but own that the Power which set all this whirl of atoms agoing is worthy of all admiration. And approbation? Ah, that is another matter; for there the moral element comes in. It is possible (and here lies the interest of the enigma) that the Veiled Being may one day justify himself even morally. Perhaps he is all the time doing so behind the veil. But on that it is absolutely useless to speculate. Light may one day come to us, but it will come through patient investigation,

not through idle pondering and guessing. In the meantime, poised between the macrocosm and the microcosm, ourselves including both extremes, and being, perhaps, the most stupendous miracle of all, we cannot deny to this amazing frame of things the tribute of an unutterable awe. If that be religion, I profess myself as religious as Mr. Wells. I am even willing to join him in some outward, ceremonial expression of that sentiment, if he can suggest one that shall not be ridiculously inadequate. What about kneeling through the C Minor Symphony? That seems to me about as near as we can get. Or I will go with him to Primrose Hill some fine morning (like the Persian Ambassador fabled by Charles Lamb) and worship the Sun, chanting to him William Watson's magnificent hymn:—

> "To thee as our Father we bow,
> Forbidden thy Father to see,
> Who is older and greater than thou, as thou
> Art greater and older than we."

The sun, at any rate, is not a figure of speech, and is a symbol which runs no risk of being mistaken for a portrait. If Mr. Wells would be content with some such "bright sciential idolatry," I would willingly declare myself a co-idolater.

But alas! he is the hierophant of the Invisible King, and prayer to that impotent potentate is to me a moral impossibility. I would rather face damnation, especially in the mild form threatened by Mr. Wells, which consists (pp. 148–149) in not knowing that you are damned.

And if Mr. Wells maintains that in the worship of the non-moral Veiled Being there is no practical, pragmatic comfort, I reply that I am not so sure of that. When all is said and done, is there not more hope, more solace, in an enigma than in a *façon de parler?* I should be quite willing to accept the test of the reeling aeroplane. The aviator can say to his soul: "Here am I, one of the most amazing births of time, the culmination of an endless series of miracles. Perhaps I am on the verge of extinction—if so, what does it all matter? But perhaps, on the contrary, I am about to plunge into some new adventure, as marvellous as this. More marvellous it cannot be, but it may perhaps be more agreeable. At all events, there is something fascinating in this leap in the dark. Good bye, my soul! Good-bye, my memory!

'If we should meet again, why, we shall smile;
If not, why then this parting was well made.'"

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I cannot but think that there is as much religion and as much solace in such a shaking-off of "the bur o' the world" as in the thought that the last new patent God is going to die with you, and that you, unconsciously and indistinguishably merged in him, are going to live for ever.

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Archer, William. W642Ya

God + Mr. Wells.

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